



WATCHMEN

WATCHMEN

Screenplay

by

Sam Hamm

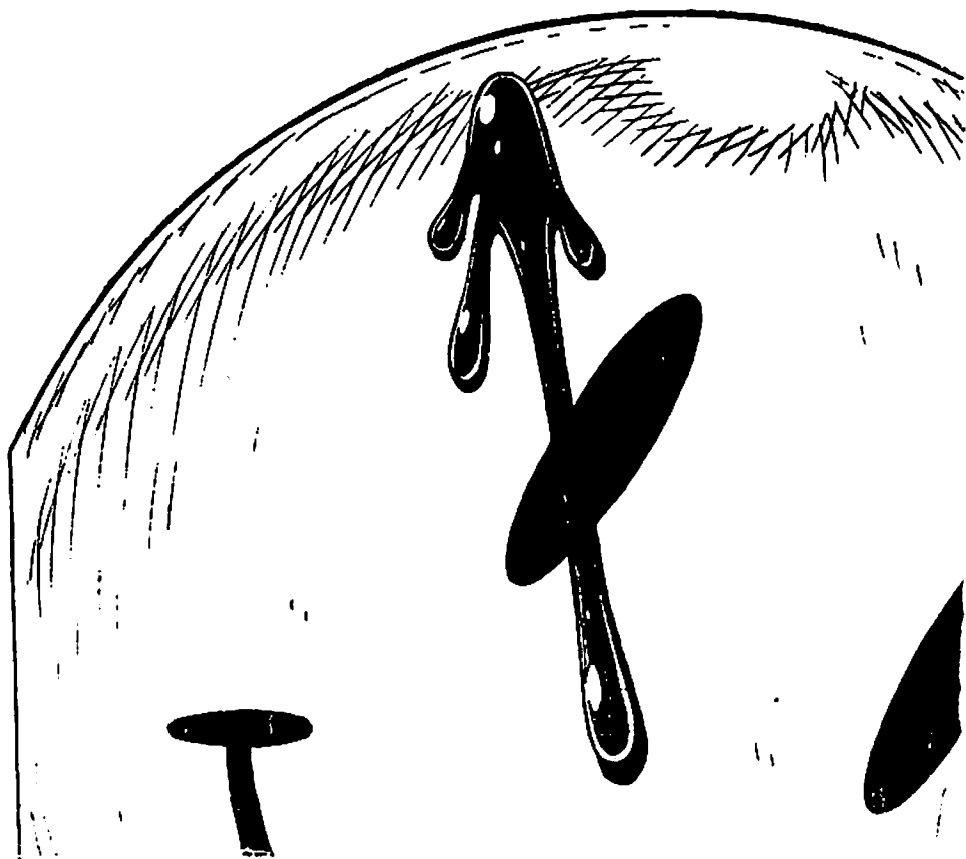
Based on the graphic novel

by

Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons

FIRST DRAFT

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FADE IN:

1. EXT. NEW YORK - LIBERTY ISLAND - DAY

The STATUE OF LIBERTY stands watch at the mouth of the Hudson. Over scene, we SUPER TITLE:

NEW YORK CITY - JULY 1976

2. EXT. JERSEY CITY PIER - DAY

A live news update. Network correspondent CINDY CHAN stands at the edge of the dock, the statue plainly visible in the distance behind her.

CINDY

-- insist that the situation is under control. Authorities have just agreed to the release of nine Radical Front prisoners in hopes of freeing the hostages.

(adjusting her hair)

We repeat: terrorists have taken Liberty Island, and are holding some forty hostages -- including tourists and maintenance workers -- captive in the Statue of Liberty itself.

3. EXT. FERRYBOAT - DAY

The ferry -- one of six anchored a half-mile off Liberty Island -- has been commandeered by a fully-armed SWAT TEAM. The SWAT CAPTAIN, who's in charge of negotiations, speaks to the terrorists via walkie-talkie.

SWAT CAPTAIN

Your demands have been met. The prisoners and the money are on their way. If you tune your TV to channel 4 you'll see the copters preparing for takeoff.

4. INT. STATUE - THAT MOMENT

The screen of a portable TV shows THREE HELICOPTERS lifting off from LaGuardia. We're in the OBSERVATION ROOM inside the statue's head.

A TERRORIST holds a crowd of SQUEALING TOURISTS -- men, women, schoolchildren -- at bay with an automatic rifle. Two others stand by the windows, scanning the harbor for signs of a double-cross; and a fourth, the RINGLEADER, speaks into a walkie-talkie.

RINGLEADER

Good. We got forty innocent people here. One false move . . . and we blow her brains out.

SWAT CAPTAIN (O.S.)
(filter, from walkie-talkie)
 Blow whose brains out?

5. EXT. STATUE - THAT MOMENT

TIGHT on the ring of OBSERVATION WINDOWS situated just below the jutting spikes of the CROWN. CAMERA PULLS BACK rapidly to take in the whole of the statue's head.

RINGLEADER (O.S.)
(a nasty laugh)
 Lady Liberty, my friend. Lady Liberty's brains!

6. EXT. FERRY - THAT MOMENT - DAY

MOUNTING TENSION among the SWAT TEAM on deck.

SWAT COP
 Sons of bitches.

SWAT CAPTAIN
 Relax. We'll nail 'em on the transfer. Let's get those hostages out first.

SWAT COP II
 Captain . . . what the hell is that?

All eyes turn upward. In the distance, a TINY SPECK descends from the clouds and drops, in a perfectly vertical line, toward the head of the statue. The SWAT CAPTAIN hoists a pair of binoculars:

SWAT CAPTAIN
 Shit. Shit fire!!

SWAT COP
 Sir! What is it?

7. POV SHOT - THROUGH BINOCULARS

A magnified view of the SPECK, which turns out to be a futuristic, blimplike HOVERCRAFT - the OWLSHIP.

SWAT CAPTAIN (O.S.)
 Christ almighty, it's the goddamned Watchmen!

8. INT. OWLSHIP - THAT MOMENT

In the cabin we find THREE COSTUMED SUPERHEROES: the red-and-gold-suited CAPTAIN METROPOLIS; RORSCHACH, whose face is a shifting inkblot mask; and NIGHT OWL, who's manning the instrument panel.

NIGHT OWL

Okay, Adrian, we're in position. What now?

He looks up at a monitor mounted over the controls. ADRIAN VEIDT, blond scientific wizard, answers calmly from Watchmen HQ:

VEIDT

(on monitor)

Let's take out their communications. Drop the scrambler.

9. EXT. HEAD OF STATUE - DAY

A line drops from the Owship, and an ELECTRONIC DEVICE lands with a thud on the dome of Lady Liberty's crown.

10. INT. OBSERVATION ROOM - THAT MOMENT

TERRORISTS staring at the portable TV screen; suddenly, it shows nothing but snow. The RINGLEADER, suspicious, lifts his walkie-talkie:

RINGLEADER

Hey. We got a problem here --

He releases the button. No reply -- only loud, hissing STATIC.

RINGLEADER

Come in. Do you read me? Don't play around with us. Goddammit!

11. EXT. FERRY - THAT MOMENT

The SWAT CAPTAIN curses at his useless walkie-talkie. Teeth bared, he glowers up at the Owship and paces the deck in a psychotic frenzy.

SWAT COP

Ignorant bastards! They've jammed us!

SWAT COP

What do we do now?

SWAT CAPTAIN

We sit here with our thumbs up our butts. As usual.

12. EXT. LIBERTY ISLAND - THAT MOMENT - DAY

A HULKING FIGURE, outfitted in SCUBA GEAR, emerges from the water. There's an evil-looking RIFLE slung over his shoulder. As he swaggers toward the base of the statue, he peels off his wetsuit to reveal yet another gaudy COSTUME underneath.

Superhero #4: THE COMEDIAN. He pins a BADGE to his leather breastplate; incongruously, it's a HAPPY-FACE BUTTON – and it matches his own nasty SMILE as he marches forward into battle.

13. INT. BASE OF STATUE - THAT MOMENT - DAY

A TRIO OF TERRORISTS standing guard near the entrance in the base of the statue. They're holding a JANITOR at gunpoint. One of them is fumbling with his walkie-talkie, which has inexplicably gone haywire:

TERRORIST I

Base to head. Base to head. Come in!
(flustered)
I can't get shit!

TERRORIST II

What the hell is going on??

There's a sudden metallic CLANG behind them. They turn in unison – just as the COMEDIAN struts into frame, assault rifle in hand.

Panic. The three TERRORISTS fall into a tight cluster at the base of a long metal stairway. One of them grabs the JANITOR, holds a gun to his head.

TERRORIST I

Drop your gun or the old man's dead!

The COMEDIAN strikes a pose and scratches his chin – he's thinking it over.

TERRORIST I

I'M NOT JOKING!!

The COMEDIAN shrugs: okay. He lifts his rifle and fires TWO SILENCED SHOTS directly into the JANITOR's gut. The old man's body jerks twice and he slumps to the floor, stone dead.

The TERRORISTS stand there aghast. For an instant they're too stunned to shoot. The COMEDIAN breaks into a dopey grin –

COMEDIAN

The joke's on you.

– and opens fire with a look of VICIOUS PLEASURE on his face. As the saying goes . . . it's nice to see a man who enjoys his work.

14. INT. OWLSHIP - THAT MOMENT

RORSCHACH and CAPT. METROPOLIS stand over an open hatch in the floor of the cabin. At the console, NIGHT OWL hits a button. Then –

15. INT. OBSERVATION ROOM - A MOMENT LATER - DAY

A sudden BOOM. A FLASH OF COLOR. The startled TERRORISTS turn to the nearest window, and see a spectacular display of BICENTENNIAL FIREWORKS bursting above the harbor a short distance away.

While the TERRORISTS are distracted, our attention shifts to a point behind them. Through an OBSERVATION WINDOW we see CAPT. METROPOLIS and RORSCHACH sliding down a thin metal cable and LANDING on the statue's upraised TORCH.

The TERRORISTS turn back just as the superheroes disappear around the far side of the torch.

RINGLEADER

I don't like this. Go downstairs and see what's up.

16. EXT. STATUE - ON TORCH - THAT MOMENT - DAY

RORSCHACH and CAPT METROPOLIS pry open a metal door on the torch.

RORSCHACH

Got your flashgun?

CAPT. METROPOLIS nods. He puts on a pair of IONIZED SUNGLASSES and goes through the door, into the torch. RORSCHACH waits behind.

17. INT. BASE OF STATUE - A MOMENT LATER - DAY

The COMEDIAN is wandering around with a MAP of the statue's layout. He spots what looks like a MANHOLE COVER set in the concrete floor, then strolls over and jimmies it open.

ANOTHER FIGURE in scuba gear climbs out. But this one's different. This one's a WOMAN.

SILK SPECTRE

About time. It stinks down there.

COMEDIAN

B-team's upstairs. We gotta find that bomb.

As the COMEDIAN saunters off, she strips out of her slime-drenched wetsuit. You guessed it - a garish (and kinda sexy) COSTUME underneath.

SILK SPECTRE

Why do I get all the glamor jobs?

COMEDIAN

A woman's work is never done.

18. INT. OBSERVATION ROOM - THAT MOMENT - DAY

The TERRORISTS tense up at the sound of FOOTSTEPS. A moment later, CAPT. METROPOLIS appears on the stairs. The TERRORISTS train their guns on him - all but the RINGLEADER, who grabs a TEN-YEAR-OLD GIRL.

RINGLEADER

I don't know who you are, pal, but you just killed a little girl.

CAPT. METROPOLIS

Please. There's something I'd like you to see first.

He holds up what looks like an old-fashioned photographer's flash. All at once, the ROOM GOES WHITE - and by the time the blinding light has dimmed, TERRORISTS and HOSTAGES alike are toppling to the floor, their nervous systems temporarily FRIED.

All except CAPT. METROPOLIS, who's wearing his special sunglasses. He pockets the shades and swiftly goes to work.

19. INT. STATUE - NEAR BASE - A MOMENT LATER

An edgy TERRORIST all alone, standing watch. Suddenly he's grabbed from behind - and THE COMEDIAN is holding the point of a BAYONET at his throat.

COMEDIAN

Okay, Abdul. Where's the bomb?

20. INT. OBSERVATION ROOM - A MOMENT LATER - DAY

Everyone's slowly coming around. By now CAPT. METROPOLIS has the TERRORISTS tied up; he's consoling a squawling THREE-YEAR-OLD.

CAPT. METROPOLIS

Don't cry, little one. You're in good hands.

(standing; to the crowd)

Now listen carefully. We're going out through the torch.

He goes to a window, gives the thumbs-up sign to RORSCHACH out on the torch. RORSCHACH signals the Owship.

21. EXT. STATUE - ON TORCH - A MOMENT LATER

A METAL LADDER descends from the belly of the Owship. RORSCHACH secures it to the lip of the torch.

22. INT. STATUE - MIDSECTION - THAT MOMENT

SILK SPECTRE and THE COMEDIAN marching up a long metal stairway.

SILK SPECTRE

Should be just overhead. We have to distract them somehow . . .

COMEDIAN

Just barge in. While they're staring at your tits we'll blow their balls off.

They look up. A **TERRORIST** is peering down at them from an overhead landing. The **COMEDIAN** lifts his rifle: thwip. Before the terrorist hits the floor, the **COMEDIAN** has lobbed a **GAS GRENADE** onto the landing.

• 23. **INT. STATUE - STAIRWAY LANDING - A MOMENT LATER**

Gas everywhere. The **TERRORISTS' BOMB**, and it's a big fat one, sits in a complicated housing at the center of the landing. **UNCONSCIOUS TERRORISTS** are sprawled all around it. **SILK SPECTRE** and the **COMEDIAN**, in gas masks, march up the stairs and size things up:

COMEDIAN

Well. They look distracted.

(turning to face her)

Don't suppose you know how to disarm one of these babies . . . ?

SILK SPECTRE

Eddie -- I

Suddenly panicked, she grabs his shoulder, points behind him. He turns.

One of the **TERRORISTS** still has some life in him. He drags himself over to the bomb and -- with his last ounce of strength -- **FLIPS A SWITCH** on the housing.

A **TIMER** begins to count down. Thirty seconds. Twenty-nine.

COMEDIAN

SHIT!

He hits a trigger on his belt, and a **RED SIGNAL LIGHT** begins to blink. He spots an elevator door, runs over, and pries it open. An empty shaft; the car is some twenty stories below them.

SILK SPECTRE

What about the --

COMEDIAN

FUCK 'EM!!

There's a mountain-climber's **CARABINER** on his belt; he fastens it around the **ELEVATOR CABLE** -- and **DROPS**. **SILK SPECTRE** hesitates only a second before following suit.

24. INT. OBSERVATION ROOM - A MOMENT LATER

CAPT. METROPOLIS is herding HOSTAGES down the stairway. All at once, he FREEZES. There's a red SIGNAL LIGHT flashing on his belt as well.

25. INT. OWLSHIP - THAT MOMENT

YET ANOTHER RED LIGHT is flashing on NIGHT OWL's instrument panel. He looks up at VEIDT on the monitor.

NIGHT OWL

Adrian!

VEIDT

Yeah, I see it. Mission aborted.

NIGHT OWL

Well, good God, we can't just -

VEIDT

Mission aborted, Daniell

NIGHT OWL reluctantly agrees. He lets out the throttle.

26. INT. STATUE - STAIRWAY LANDING - THAT MOMENT

On the BOMB. The timer shows ten seconds to go.

27. INT. STATUE - ELEVATOR SHAFT - A MOMENT LATER

The COMEDIAN and SILK SPECTRE plummet downward, their BELT CLASPS throwing off sparks against the cable.

28. INT. OBSERVATION ROOM - A MOMENT LATER

CAPT. METROPOLIS at the window, petrified with fear, his hands pressed to the glass. He watches as the Owlship flies away - and RORSCHACH, who's clinging to the metal ladder, is YANKED BODILY off the torch.

29. INT. STATUE - ELEVATOR SHAFT - THAT MOMENT

THE COMEDIAN makes a hard landing on the roof of a car. SILK SPECTRE touches down behind him just as he manages to pry a set of elevator doors open, and the two of them dive through.

30. AERIAL SHOT - MOVING OVER HARBOR - A MOMENT LATER

RORSCHACH clings desperately to the metal ladder as the Owlship streaks across the harbor. Behind him is the rapidly receding figure of Lady Liberty.

Three beats later, a GAPING HOLE blows open in her midsection.

31. INT. OWLSHIP - THAT MOMENT

A heartsick NIGHT OWL pounds the control panel in frustration. On an overhead monitor, the upper portion of the statue is TOPPLING.

32. INT. STATUE - A MOMENT LATER

Smoke everywhere. The COMEDIAN and SILK SPECTRE are pressed flat against a CONCRETE BULKHEAD. An overhang protects them from falling DEBRIS - which is raining down in copious quantities.

33. EXT. FERRY - A MOMENT LATER

The furious SWAT CAPTAIN watches in astonishment as the top half of the statue disintegrates into RUBBLE and tumbles to the ground. He turns away from the sight, shaking his head in vehement disgust.

SWAT CAPTAIN

That's it. I quit.

The water stirs. The boat begins to ROCK. On deck, all eyes turn -

34. EXT. LIBERTY ISLAND - THAT MOMENT - DAY

- as a LUMINOUS BLUE-SKINNED GIANT, SIXTY FEET TALL, wades through the harbor and steps up onto the island. He stares in dismay at the demolished statue . . . like a modern-day Colossus of Rhodes wondering what the hell happened to his date.

Meet the last - and most powerful - member of our happy band: DR. MANHATTAN.

Down below, THE COMEDIAN and SILK SPECTRE - battered but intact - are crawling out of the wreckage. The COMEDIAN looks up at the huge blue figure looming over them, and shakes a gnat-sized fist:

COMEDIAN

ASSHOLE! WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG?!

CUT TO:

35. INT. TV STUDIO - NIGHT

The Channel 4 Newsroom, with anchors SHEILA SHEA and JIM BRADLEY.

SHEILA

In the face of mounting public pressure, the city of New York has revoked its contract with Adrian Veidt's super-team. Local police have threatened a city-wide walkout if criminal charges against the Watchmen are dropped.

On the bluescreen behind them, red circles with diagonal crossbars surround SIX HEAD SHOTS of the individual WATCHMEN.

JIM

And in Washington today, the Senate introduced legislation which would ban all costumed adventurers nationwide. Easy passage is expected.

(shuffling his papers)

Well, Sheila, it looks like the age of the superhero is officially history.

DISSOLVE TO:

36. CREDITS SEQUENCE

TIMEPIECES of every description -- pocket watches, grandfather clocks, travel alarms, all perfectly synchronized -- DRIFT UPWARD through a vast black void, ticking off the seconds. At the stroke of midnight, GONGS sound, BUZZERS buzz, BELLS tinkle -- and without warning the clocks EXPLODE. As gears and coils and crystals cascade downward through the void, we SUPER TITLE:

WATCHMEN

FADE THROUGH TO:

37. EXT. HIGH-RISE - NIGHT

Darkened windows glow with the dim fire of reflected neon as we TILT UP the towering facade of a forty-story apartment building. A BLIMP drifts lazily through distant clouds; the sounds of traffic echo faint and dreamlike in the wind as we reach the penthouse -- where heavy curtains flutter behind the ragged matte of a SHATTERED PLATE-GLASS WINDOW. SUPER TITLE:

NEW YORK CITY -- TEN YEARS LATER

38. EXT. STREET BELOW - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT

A ramshackle NEWS KIOSK. The OWNER, fat and stubbly, sits framed by the garish covers of comic books and nudie mags, staring at the high-rise across the street. THREE POLICE CARS -- oddly truncated bubble-shaped vehicles, recognizable from the flashing red beacons on their roofs -- sit on the curb amid a throng of ONLOOKERS.

A CUSTOMER picks up a copy of the New York Gazette: "NEW SKIRMISH ON AFGHAN BORDER. RUSSKIES WALK OUT ON PEACE POWWOW."

CUSTOMER

Crazy reds don't know who they're messing with.

(Indicating the cop cars)

What happened over there?

NEWS VENDOR

Some guy went sidewalk divin'. Twenny-five cents.

39. EXT. HIGH-RISE - STREET LEVEL - NIGHT

A riot of noise and color. A plainclothes COP takes a statement from the DOORMAN as PEDESTRIANS, clustered around an NYPD cordon, stare with sickened expressions at a gruesome mess on the sidewalk.

PATROLMAN

STAND BACK! MOVE ALONG!

We are not in New York as we know it; in this strange offshoot of reality, everything – the clothes, the cars, the very look of the city – seems just a touch off. The PATROLMAN, for instance: his standard-issue uniform consists of full riot gear, and his plastisteel breastplate is festooned with heavy artillery. He clears a path for a squad of PARAMEDICS, who load a bloody parcel into the back of a waiting ambulance.

DET. LT. BURNS climbs out of his car, squeezes through the crowd and buttonholes his colleague, HYDE, the cop in charge of the investigation.

BURNS

Had a lot of blood in him.

HYDE

You oughta see upstairs. It's a slaughterhouse.

BURNS

No idea who's behind this?

HYDE

Small army, from the looks of it. He put up one hell of a fight.

BURNS nods once and stares up toward the penthouse window.

BURNS

He would. – You might as well know. It's gonna get messy. We got a call from Washington.

HYDE

Washington?

BURNS

They want in. Seems our friend here was hard-core CTU.

HYDE, suddenly wide-eyed at this new development, stares off after the ambulance as it merges with the northbound traffic.

40. EXT. STREET - ANOTHER ANGLE - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT

TIGHT ON a large placard: "THE END IS NIGH." The bearer of the sign, a hunched STREET CRAZY in a ratty raincoat, plods up the sidewalk spreading his message of cheer; his back is to us, but we can make out an unruly shock of bright RED HAIR.

The NEWS VENDOR eyes him suspiciously as he passes, then turns up his collar and looks pointedly away. A SMALL BLACK KID, leaning against the kiosk with a comic book, spots him too, and makes a quick, crosseyed face. The STREET CRAZY lets out a low, hissing GROWL in response and plugs on.

At the high-rise, a sanitation crew has just arrived to hose down the sidewalks; RIVULETS OF WATER crisscross the street. As the STREET CRAZY wanders along, he spots something unusual snagged in a rain grate.

It's a HAPPY-FACE BUTTON. A tiny diagonal fleck of BLOOD stains its surface, like the hand of a clock poised at twelve minutes to midnight.

The STREET CRAZY bends to retrieve it. He stares off at the shattered window some forty stories above.

DISSOLVE TO:

41. INT. HIGH-RISE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

CAMERA DRIFTS from the penthouse elevator down a long, plush-carpeted corridor. The hallway is cordoned with thin plastic strips reading "POLICE LINE - DO NOT CROSS." At the far end is a single door, SEALED OFF.

42. INT. PENTHOUSE APARTMENT - NIGHT

MOONLIGHT SHINES on an obstacle course of broken chairs and overturned tables as we move inexorably toward the shattered picture window. At this altitude, the wind is fierce, and the curtains are flapping wildly.

A ROPE drops into view. A DARK SILHOUETTE lands on the ledge outside.

SHARDS OF GLASS crunch underfoot as this strange INTRUDER steps inside. He wears a slouch hat, a heavy trenchcoat; his face is invisible to us as he snaps on a flashlight and sweeps it around the room.

The apartment is, as promised, a slaughterhouse: smashed art prints, gaping holes in the wallboard, and gallons of BLOOD everywhere. The flashlight beam shines on the front door, where THREE DEADBOLT LOCKS and an electronic alarm system are still in place, undisturbed.

The INTRUDER turns suddenly. His beam strikes the splintered remains of a full-length WALL MIRROR - and there, in the cracked and spiky glass, we get our first good look at his face. Or what passes for his face.

He has no eyes, no nose, no mouth, nothing but a strange and ever-shifting series of symmetrical patterns where his face should be . . . a living, crawling inkblot on a luminescent field of white.

We've met him before. He goes by the name of RORSCHACH.

43. INT. PENTHOUSE - KITCHEN - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT

RORSCHACH'S BEAM falls on the kitchen table. HUNGRY FLIES walk dainty-legged through a sticky puddle of congealing blood. Offhandedly, he brushes the flies away; then he spots a SUGAR BOWL. He tips it over, scoops up a handful of cubes, deposits them in his trenchcoat pocket.

44. INT. PENTHOUSE - BEDROOM - A MOMENT LATER - NIGHT

The beam shines across rumpled bedclothes, searches around the walls, and settles finally on the half-open door to a walk-in closet. RORSCHACH steps inside, examines rack upon rack of expensive suits.

He shoves the suits aside. Then, mysteriously, he begins to POUND on the wall with his fist, moving left, right, up, down: THUMP. THUMP. THUMP.

He pauses. He's found a hollow section. He feels his way carefully along the seams of the wall and floorboard until he discovers a CONCEALED TRIGGER. He presses it and a panel slides back, revealing a SECOND, SECRET CLOSET, hidden inside the first.

He reaches up, flicks on a light. Inside the secret closet: a bizarre UNIFORM - helmet, mask and gloves, a gaudy-colored bodysuit, rows of exotic weaponry. On the wall nearby hangs a dusty framed PHOTOGRAPH.

RORSCHACH examines the photo. It's a group shot, six men, one woman, all dressed in similarly garish uniforms. The man in the center is wearing the costume on the wall before us . . . the COMEDIAN's costume.

They're all there, all the Watchmen: NIGHT OWL. SILK SPECTRE. CAPT. METROPOUS. DR. MANHATTAN. ADRIAN VEIDT. And of course, RORSCHACH himself. As he eyes this quirky memento of days gone by, we

DISSOLVE TO:

45. EXT. STREET CORNER - BROOKLYN - NIGHT

A LIGHT RAIN is falling as a weary figure emerges from a corner store. DANIEL DREIBERG, 44, thickset and bespectacled, walks with the heavy gait of an athlete gone to seed. He seems meek, defeated - old before his time.

He holds a hand to the skies, sets down his grocery bags long enough to open an umbrella. Then he turns down a deserted access street.

46. EXT. ACCESS STREET - NIGHT

In an alleyway just off the access street, there's a MUGGING in progress: two young street toughs, their tinted hair tied up in knot-tops, rolling a middle-aged man. Across the street, DREIBERG sees what's happening; it takes some effort, but he makes a conscious decision to move on. Then -

VOICE

Hold up, papa-san!

The KNOT-TOPS have emerged from the alleyway with their loot, and spotted DREIBERG - an unwanted witness. Menace in their eyes, they march toward him. He sets his bags down and turns to face them, almost welcoming the challenge; and suddenly, without warning, we

CUT TO:

47. FLASHBACK - PROCESSED FOOTAGE

Slow-mo, double-frame, or sepia-tone; you call it. But whatever the gimmick, it should suggest that the events we're watching take place in a stylized dream-time, midway between flashback and fantasy.

It's our old friend NIGHT OWL, duking it out with a gang of HOODS in an alleyway not unlike the one we've just left. There's a flurry of fists; the HOODS topple, in quick succession -

- and all at once a burst of BLINDING LIGHT BLEACHES OUT THE FRAME, transporting us back to:

48. EXT. ACCESS STREET - NIGHT

Real-time again. Our reverie's been interrupted by a SHAFT OF WHITE-HOT LIGHT sweeping across the street, past DREIBERG, toward the alley.

LOUDSPEAKER

HALT! DO NOT TRY TO RESIST -

The KNOT-TOPS run for it. DREIBERG shields his eyes against the LIGHT - which emanates from a POLICE HOVERCRAFT hanging in midair some forty feet above his head. The craft swoops off in pursuit of the kids.

DREIBERG bends to retrieve his things and crosses to the mouth of the alleyway. He finds the old man slumped against a wall, obviously past help.

49. INT. DREIBERG'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

THREE DEADBOLT LOCKS slide back as DREIBERG lets himself in. The security system is almost as impressive as the one in the COMEDIAN's apartment, but the decor is considerably less plush.

DREIBERG sets his bags on the floor, removes his raincoat, and hangs it carefully in a closet. Then he gathers his groceries, heads for the kitchen -- and STOPS IN HIS TRACKS, confronted with a most peculiar sight:

DREIBERG

. . . Rorschach.

50. INT. DREIBERG'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Leaning back in a chair, his feet propped up on the kitchen table, is the aforementioned RORSCHACH. His inkblot mask is rolled partway up, exposing a mouthful of bad teeth, and he's calmly eating a plate of baked beans.

DREIBERG

How did you get in here?

Ignoring the question, RORSCHACH greets him in a soft, rasping, utterly emotionless whisper:

RORSCHACH

Hiya, pardner. Long time no see.

DREIBERG

Did anybody follow you? See you come here?

DREIBERG is mildly panicked. RORSCHACH -- who couldn't care less -- emits his trademark hissing GROWL. He spoons more beans from a can onto his plate, tops it all off with a generous squirt of ketchup from a squeeze bottle.

DREIBERG (cont.)

I can't believe you're back on the streets. Good God, man, you're wanted on fourteen counts of murder.

RORSCHACH

At least six of those are trumped-up. -- Here.

He reaches into his pocket, finds the HAPPY-FACE button, and flips it to DREIBERG. DREIBERG eyes it for a moment, automatically uses his fingernail to scrape at the small red STAIN on its surface.

RORSCHACH (cont.)

Look familiar?

DREIBERG

Sure. You got some kind of -- bean juice on it.

RORSCHACH

Human bean juice.

(beat)

The Comedian is dead.

DREIBERG stares down at the button, suddenly getting the picture. His jaw goes slack.

RORSCHACH (cont.)

Had a real nice place - penthouse suite, forty stories up - beautiful view. Hope he enjoyed it on the way down.

DREIBERG

Jesus. What. A burglar . . . ?

RORSCHACH snorts: the possibility is too comical to consider.

DREIBERG (cont.)

Well, God, he'd been working with the CTU for almost a decade - he must've had enemies.

RORSCHACH

So do I. So do you.

DREIBERG

Rorschach, that was a long time ago. I mean, that - that's just paranoia.

RORSCHACH's head jerks violently at the sound of the word. DREIBERG blinks involuntarily, half-expecting some kind of reprisal. But RORSCHACH merely stands, adjusts his mask, and starts toward the front door.

RORSCHACH

Maybe. Or maybe somebody's finally caught up with us. Somebody with a grudge.

(pause)

Thought you might want to spread the word.

DREIBERG

Hey. Hey. If you don't mind, use the back stairs, all right?

RORSCHACH growls, shakes his head in disgust - but complies. He opens the back door, pauses, turns to DREIBERG.

RORSCHACH

You the sentimental type, Daniel? - Brought you a souvenir.

He reaches into his trenchcoat and hands DREIBERG the framed photo from the COMEDIAN's wall. A moment later, he's gone.

DREIBERG sits down, unnerved. As he reaches for the wall phone, CAMERA ZEROES IN on a face from the photo: a blonde man, in a purple tunic and mask . . .

51. INT. OFFICE SUITE - DOWNTOWN MANHATTAN - NIGHT

A GREAT SHADOWY JUNGLE CAT pads across acres of carpet. The cat is far from its natural habitat; in back of it is a glass-and-chrome desk outfitted with a computer terminal, and at the terminal is ADRIAN VEIDT, the brains behind the Watchmen. Although he's DREIBERG's age, his face is serene and unlined by worry. Blond and pale, he looks thirty. When he's sixty he'll look forty.

VEIDT - millionaire industrialist, and holder of over forty basic patents - is also something of an Egyptologist, and the decor of his office reflects it: ancient vases, sarcophagi, busts of Anubis, and the like. He keys a string of figures into the computer, the PHONE RINGS.

VEIDT

Veidt here.

52. INTERCUT DREIBERG AND VEIDT

DREIBERG

Adrian? Listen, it's Dreiberg. I just had a visit from Rorschach. I had to call you before he -

VEIDT

Daniel, slow down. What's this about Rorschach?

DREIBERG

The Comedian. He's dead. Murdered. That's all I know.

VEIDT

My God. Murdered? - What's this have to do with Rorschach?

DREIBERG

It's - he's got some kind of conspiracy theory. He thinks someone's. . . I don't know, stalking us.

VEIDT

Us. You mean the Watchmen.

The big CAT purrs; it's a mutant lynx, genetically tailored, with red fur and long, tufted, antenna-like ears. VEIDT tosses the lynx a chunk of raw meat from a platter on his desk while he ponders DREIBERG's words.

VEIDT (cont.)

Daniel, Rorschach is insane.

DREIBERG

I know, I know, it's just - he's back on the street, he smells blood.

VEIDT

You know how he is. He goes on these binges, kills a couple of thugs - then he's satisfied. It blows over.

DREIBERG

He's bound to get caught. I don't want my name coming out. Not at this late date.

VEIDT

If he comes here, I'll handle him. Remember - I've always protected you. Haven't I?

(slight pause)

Do you need money?

DREIBERG

No. I just wanted you to -

VEIDT

You did the right thing, Daniel. Let's stay in touch, okay? Good night.

DREIBERG

Good night.

VEIDT leans back in his chair, reaches for a gold case and extracts a cigarette. It's 'matchless': you ignite it by striking the tip of the cigarette against the edge of the case. He lights up and takes a long, slow drag.

CUT TO:

53. EXT. MILITARY INSTALLATION - NIGHT

Barbed wire, armed GUARDS everywhere. A vehicle waits at the checkpoint; the GUARDS wave it through, and a huge cast-iron GATE rolls into place behind it. On the gate is a small, tasteful sign which reads: "ROCKEFELLER MILITARY RESEARCH CENTER."

54. INT. MILITARY INSTALLATION - NIGHT

ADRIAN VEIDT walks down a long, greenish corridor flanked by ARMED ESCORT TROOPS. At the end of the hallway is a foot-thick metal door with a KEYPAD off to one side; one of the TROOPS punches in a six-digit access code, and the door slides back to reveal . . .

. . . another door, this one outfitted with a simple doorbell. The TROOPS ring the bell, stand rigidly at attention, and wait - to VEIDT's great amusement.

The inner door slides open. Peering out is an attractive, big-boned woman in her mid-thirties: LAURIE JUSPECZYK - aka the SILK SPECTRE.

LAURIE

Adrian.

VEIDT

Laurie! Good to see you.

She gives him a warm hug. The ESCORT TROOPS march back down the hall in perfect lockstep as the giant metal doors ease shut behind them.

LAURIE escorts VEIDT into a huge laboratory space: great oversized machines, blinking computer terminals, advanced scientific paraphernalia of every description.

VEIDT (cont.)

Nice. Who's your decorator - Edward Teller?

LAURIE

Don't rub it in. I live here.

VEIDT

And how's life with the walking H-bomb?

LAURIE

He's in by the superaccelerator. - Let me take your coat.

She takes his coat and vanishes into the living quarters. VEIDT wanders through the lab with an envious eye. Suddenly he stops. A SMILE crosses his face as he gazes up at the ceiling:

VEIDT

Hi, Jon.

DR. MANHATTAN (O.S.)

(a deep, booming voice)

Hello, Adrian.

DR. MANHATTAN - Jon Osterman to his friends - is a big guy under any circumstances, but at the moment he's downright gargantuan. Forty feet tall, bright blue and buck naked, he's calmly adjusting a calibration atop his particle accelerator.

DR. MANHATTAN (cont.)

I think I'm about to detect a gluino.

In case you were wondering, this blue-skinned superman can do just about anything. He can manipulate matter effortlessly; the physical universe is his plaything. When it comes to the laws of time and space, DR. MANHATTAN is a chronic offender.

Any government would be glad to have him.

VEIDT

Supersymmetrical theory, hmm? Say, I understand old Schwartzmann caught a decaying proton in that German mineshaft . . .

LAURIE, who's just reappeared, shakes her head and groans.

LAURIE

Please, you guys, no shop talk.

(to DR. MANHATTAN)

Jon, you're being rude. Why don't you shrivel on down and join us?

DR. MANHATTAN shrugs and shrinks down to a somewhat more manageable six-foot-five. A pair of BLACK TRUNKS materializes about his waist.-- preserving his modesty. Satisfied, LAURIE turns to VEIDT:

LAURIE (cont.)

Good to see you, Adrian. What's the occasion?

He tosses a casual glance around the lab. A number of VIDEO SURVEILLANCE CAMERAS are mounted on the walls.

VEIDT

. . . Are we being monitored?

DR. MANHATTAN looks at each of the cameras in turn. One by one, the little red 'ON' lights wink out.

DR. MANHATTAN

The bearer of bad news?

VEIDT

We've lost a colleague. The Comedian is dead.

LAURIE

Blake? Dead?

DR. MANHATTAN

Yes. I heard this morning. Washington's asked me to attend the funeral as a matter of protocol.

LAURIE shoots an irritated look at DR. MANHATTAN. This is the first she's heard about it.

VEIDT

Rorschach's on the case. He's got Dreiberg in a lather. He seems to think someone is 'stalking' the Watchmen.

DR. MANHATTAN

Oh? The CTU suspects a Libyan hit squad.

VEIDT

What's your theory?

DR. MANHATTAN

Life and death are unquantifiable abstracts. They don't concern me.

VEIDT peeks at LAURIE, cocks an eyebrow: same old Jon. But LAURIE is considerably less amused.

LAURIE

I could use a drink. How about you, Adrian?

VEIDT nods yes. DR. MANHATTAN, meanwhile, has moved off to another part of the lab. He stands before a vast bank of machinery -- and as we watch, a panel detaches itself from the front of the console and floats off to one side.

A module of circuit boards, chips, and pin connectors slides out of the hole. Individual components detach themselves and HANG in midair. DR. MANHATTAN hasn't lifted a finger; he's dismantling and reassembling his equipment through sheer force of mind.

VEIDT has seen these parlor tricks before. He ambles up and resumes the conversation without missing a beat:

VEIDT

I guess you'll be dismantling Russian tanks soon.

DR. MANHATTAN

You mean Afghanistan?

(beat)

It won't require my attention. What I'm doing here is far more interesting.

The module, now fully reconstructed, slides back into place. The cover panel rises off the floor, settles over the hatch, and screws itself shut.

VEIDT

Well . . . I wanted to bring you the news about Blake, but -- as usual -- I can't tell you anything you don't already know. Goodbye, Jon.

DR. MANHATTAN nods -- just barely. VEIDT heads for the door, finds his coat where LAURIE put it. He's just about to leave when she arrives with two stiff drinks in hand.

LAURIE

Adrian! Don't leave so soon. I --

VEIDT

I'll take a raincheck, Laurie.

LAURIE

Please.

There's a note of desperation in her voice. VEIDT glances over his shoulder at DR. MANHATTAN - who's forty feet tall again, playing with his super-accelerator.

VEIDT

He's a little farther gone every time.

LAURIE

Stay, Adrian. I just - every once in a while, I need to talk to someone human.

(beat)

He doesn't think like we do. He doesn't feel what we feel. I mean - he even scares the research teams.

VEIDT

Laurie - he's the most powerful man who's ever lived. He's changed the world.

LAURIE

(embarrassed)

I know. I shouldn't be saying this. He's happy, he's content, he's doing his work -

VEIDT

What about you?

LAURIE

I suppose I'm serving my purpose, aren't I.

(pause)

I'll ring for the guards.

She goes to the steel door, hits a buzzer. VEIDT watches her, concerned. She COUGHS, violently, and he reaches into his vest pocket for a cigarette case:

VEIDT

Nasty cough. - Try one of mine.

(handing her a cigarette)

Darling, you need to get out of the house. Why don't you give Daniel a call? I'm sure he'd be glad to hear from you.

LAURIE

Maybe I'll do that.

VEIDT

I'm sorry about Blake.

He pats her on the shoulder. The door slides open and the TROOPS appear to escort VEIDT back down the hallway.

LAURIE takes a long pull on her drink and gazes up at her superhuman lover. He tinkers with his equipment; then, satisfied, he turns and WALKS THROUGH A SOLID BRICK WALL -- as if it wasn't there.

CUT TO:

55. EXT. HAPPY HARRYS - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

A decrepit waterfront bar in a particularly rough neighborhood, popular with denizens of the underworld, accessible by a narrow stairway which dips well below street level.

56. INT. HAPPY HARRYS - NIGHT

The usual crowd, living it up. HOOKERS line the bar. DRUG DEALERS hover at the entrance to the men's room. ASSORTED GOONS AND THUGS stand clustered at the pool table, watching a TOPLESS DANCER bump and grind. Suddenly there's a terrible RACKET, and everyone TURNS.

Over by the entrance, RORSCHACH is hard at work ripping a PAY PHONE off the wall. Once he has it on the floor, he gives it a couple of vicious licks with a crowbar, then he strides casually over to the bar -- where the proprietor, HAPPY HARRY, is nervously polishing glasses.

RORSCHACH

Harry.

HARRY

(petrified)

R-Rorschach.

RORSCHACH

Phone's out of order. Mind if I use yours?

He reaches under the counter, sets a phone on the bar. RORSCHACH picks it up and FLINGS IT at a nearby table, scattering the PATRONS and yanking the cord cleanly out of the wall.

He turns and faces the assembled multitudes:

RORSCHACH

Edward Blake. Friend of mine. Fell through a window. Might've had help.

(wandering around the room)

Thought maybe you could fill me in.

ENORMOUS TOUGHS sit riveted to their chairs, staring up in terror as RORSCHACH strolls past.

RORSCHACH (cont.)

You. Gideon. Whoremonger. Nothing?

(moving on)

Johnny Gobs. What's new at the schoolyard?

Behind RORSCHACH's back, a shadowy figure is slinking furtively toward the exit. RORSCHACH pivots suddenly, grabs him by the collar, yanks him off his feet and slams him into a wall.

RORSCHACH (cont.)

Nicky the Jap. In a hurry? You keeping secrets, Nicky?

NICKY sits slumped against the wall, quaking with fear. RORSCHACH extends a hand to help him up. He reaches out hesitantly -

- and RORSCHACH grabs him by the wrist, pulling him off balance. He closes a gloved fist around NICKY's pinky finger, twists it back and SNAPS IT.

RORSCHACH (cont.)

Edward Blake. Who killed him?

No answer forthcoming. NICKY lets out a horrible moan as RORSCHACH grabs his index finger and repeats the process.

RORSCHACH (cont.)

Who killed Edward Blake?

NICKY passes out. RORSCHACH releases his grip, lets NICKY sink to the floor, and reaches for his crowbar. He's standing poised to let fly at NICKY's ribs when a VOICE IN THE CROWD shouts out:

VOICE

JESUS! HE'S IN SHOCK!!

RORSCHACH

THE COMEDIAN. WHO KILLED HIM?

By now HARRY's pulled a sawed-off shotgun from underneath the bar. Without looking up, RORSCHACH spins and HEAVES THE CROWBAR. It catches HARRY in the jaw, pitching him back into a rack of glassware. The SHOTGUN discharges TWO HARMLESS BLASTS into the ceiling.

SILENCE in the bar as the ONLOOKERS await RORSCHACH's next move. He looks at the bleeding HARRY, shakes his head in disgust:

RORSCHACH (cont.)

So many vermin . . . so little time.

He bends, pulls a topcoat off NICKY's quivering frame, and tosses it contemptuously at the NUDE DANCER. Then he turns to go, pausing long enough to HISS at the crowd:

RORSCHACH (cont.)

Go back to your heroin and your child pornography. I'll be around.

CUT TO:

57. INT. MILITARY INSTALLATION - LIVING QUARTERS - PRE-DAWN

The bedroom which LAURIE shares with DR. MANHATTAN at the Rockefeller research complex. It's not quite six AM, still dark outside, and LAURIE is asleep. She tosses around under the covers, reaches over to where DR. MANHATTAN should be - but his side of the bed is empty.

LAURIE

(muttering; groggy)

Jon . . . ?

A LUMINOUS BLUE HAND enters frame, strokes her cheek gently. LAURIE closes her eyes and sighs.

DR. MANHATTAN

I'm here, Laurie.

LAURIE

Is it time? Do you have to leave for the funeral?

DR. MANHATTAN

Not yet. There's plenty of time.

A SECOND BLUE HAND strokes her hair. LAURIE stretches luxuriantly. DR. MANHATTAN kisses her softly on the throat.

LAURIE

Mmm. You feel so good. Do you have to go?

The BLUE HAND runs down the length of LAURIE's shoulder and arm, toward her hip. She sighs dreamily.

DR. MANHATTAN

Would you like me to stay?

LAURIE

Mm hmm.

DR. MANHATTAN

I could stay and go.

LAURIE

... And just how would you manage that?

She leans up to kiss him. The SECOND BLUE HAND continues its downward progress, almost colliding with a THIRD blue hand, which is massaging LAURIE's thigh.

Third blue hand? Wait a minute. LAURIE's eyes go suddenly wide. She sits bolt upright in bed.

DR. MANHATTAN is stretched out beside her. He is also sitting at the foot of the bed. There seem to be two of him.

LAURIE

AAAAAAAAAAAA!!

DR. MANHATTAN I

Laurie? Are you -

DR. MANHATTAN II

Don't be upset.

This unique menage a trois proves a bit much for LAURIE's fragile nerves. She climbs angrily out of bed and reaches for a dressing gown.

LAURIE

Jon, please. I don't enjoy these tricks. Just - be one person again, please?

The big blue twins stand up, spreading their hands in identical gestures of apology as LAURIE stalks past.

DR. MANHATTAN I

Laurie, I did it to please you. I thought -

DR. MANHATTAN II

- you would find it erotic.

LAURIE

All right, all right. It's just - my nerves, I'm going stir-crazy in this place, I -

While fumbling in her purse for a cigarette, LAURIE happens to glance through a doorway, into the lab outside. To her utter astonishment, she sees a THIRD DR. MANHATTAN out there, calmly running an experiment on one of his oversized toys. She marches angrily through the door...

58. INT. LAB - A MOMENT LATER

... to confront DR. MANHATTAN number three:

LAURIE

You've been out here all along, haven't you?
Running one of your stupid experiments -

DR. MANHATTAN III

Yes, I thought I could finish up before I leave for Washington.

LAURIE

So you sent your, your proxies in there to - Jon, really, how could you do this?

DR. MANHATTAN III

You seem to feel I've been neglecting you. Isn't that the case?

(pause)

I thought I'd solved the problem quite elegantly.

LAURIE

That's all it is to you, isn't it. Just another problem you can -

She doesn't see the other two DR. MANHATTANS, who have just entered the room behind her. They speak in perfect unison:

DR. MANHATTANS I & II

Laurie, please -

LAURIE pivots, lets out a little squeal of shock. She turns back slowly, steadies herself on a lab table.

LAURIE

Jon - just go to Washington, all right? And take them with you. I could really use the time alone.

She storms back into the living quarters, past DR. MANHATTANS I AND II - who pop out of existence as soon as she passes. The original DR. MANHATTAN cocks an eyebrow, sighs, and returns to his equipment.

FADE THROUGH TO:

1. INT. ROOFTOP RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A pricey joint in midtown. DREIBERG and LAURIE, well-fed, are hard at work on their second bottle of wine. She looks amazingly beautiful in full makeup and low-cut evening gown - but it's largely wasted on her preoccupied date.

At the moment, she's filling him in on life with Dr. Manhattan:

LAURIE

The government's really worried. He gets so flaky sometimes. I guess it's no picnic being the world's only superhuman.

(mock-macho)

I have to keep him in line.

She flexes her bicep and holds the pose, waiting for DREIBERG to laugh. He doesn't. In fact, he barely even notices; his gaze has wandered off into a far corner of the room.

LAURIE (cont.)

Excuse me - where exactly are you tonight?

DREIBERG

Sorry, it's this thing with Blake. I mean, you don't really think anyone's out to get us - do you?

LAURIE

Dan, are you really that paranoid? Let's face it, Eddie Blake was no Mother Teresa.

DREIBERG

Psychotic pig. He had it coming. Mr. CTU . . .

LAURIE

Now wait. We all had the same option as Blake. It was work for the government or do time.

DREIBERG

Fine, but the Civil Terrorism Unit? It's a fucking Gestapo! Dirty tricks - political assassinations -

Now he's got LAURIE nervous. She scans the restaurant quickly, then leans forward and speaks, in hushed tones:

LAURIE

Okay, okay. You made your choice. You went underground. Some of us made other choices.

DREIBERG

(shaking his head in disgust)

Yeah. That pig Blake gets buried at Arlington, full military honors . . . and I'm still in the psycho file with Rorschach.

LAURIE looks at him a moment. She starts to chuckle.

DREIBERG (cont.)

What's so funny? Have I got food in my teeth?

LAURIE

I'm just wondering what you would've said ten years ago if you could see yourself right now.

(raising her glass)

Well, here's to the Comedian. 'Cause the fact is, he's dead . . . and we're not.

DREIBERG makes a face – and smiles despite himself.

L. EXT. ROOFTOP OUTSIDE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

DREIBERG and LAURIE have repaired to the romantic rooftop terrace, which overlooks the Manhattan skyline. They're holding big snifters of brandy, and they're both pretty well drunk.

DREIBERG

The pisser is, nobody ever remembers all the good shit we did. I mean, we were heroes!

LAURIE

Damn straight.

DREIBERG

Damn straight! We were heroes.

LAURIE

Of course, we looked like idiots in those bondage outfits.

DREIBERG

Well, that was Adrian's idea. I know he's the smartest man in the world and all that, but – talk about publicity hounds . . .

LAURIE

(smiling)

Hey. You remember that nut in the hockey mask? With the asthma? What was his name . . .

DREIBERG

Oh yeah. The one that used to confess to everything? Hoping we'd beat him up?

LAURIE

That's the one. Whatever happened to him?

DREIBERG

(deadpan)

He pulled it on Rorschach . . . and Rorschach dropped him down an elevator shaft.

LAURIE looks aghast for a second and a half. Then her hand goes to her mouth – and like DREIBERG she's GIGGLING helplessly. CAMERA PULLS UP AND AWAY, isolating them on the rooftop, and we hear a stentorian VOICE over scene:

CHAPLAIN (V.O.)
In the midst of life we are in death . . .

CUT TO:

59. EXT. ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY - DAY

AN AMERICAN FLAG lies across the coffin of Edward Blake.

CHAPLAIN
. . . and so we commend our brother Edward
Blake unto God, who shall change our vile body
that it may be like unto his glorious body –

TIGHT ON DR. MANHATTAN, standing at graveside amid a tight knot of mourners. There's no weeping, no gnashing of teeth; most of the attendees are bureaucrats or military men, obviously here for reasons of protocol. Nearby is a cadre of riflemen, ready to send Blake off with the traditional twenty-one gun salute.

CHAPLAIN (cont.)
– according to the mighty working whereby he is
able to subdue all things unto himself.

A light rain begins to fall; umbrellas open all around. DR. MANHATTAN, of course, doesn't need one – the raindrops vanish miraculously before they strike him. CAR HORNS sound in the distance, and he glances off at:

60. EXT. ANOTHER PART OF CEMETERY - THAT MOMENT

SENTRIES stand at attention. They've blocked off the part of the cemetery where the funeral is taking place, but the good Doctor has been spotted nonetheless, and word of his presence is spreading like wildfire.

MOURNERS and TOURISTS are rushing in from every corner of the cemetery to get a look at the bright blue superman. With all due respect for the dead, Arlington National's turning into a zoo: gawkers are lined up three or four deep. The sentries have their hands full managing the crowd.

A KID breaks free from his parents and sprints across the graves to join the excited throng. As he does, our attention settles on the VIETNAM WAR MEMORIAL

It's not the familiar stark black wall. It is, bizarrely, a chiseled marble representation of DR. MANHATTAN; his eyes are turned skyward, and he's cradling a

WOUNDED AMERICAN GRUNT in his massive arms, pieta-style. On the pedestal beneath it, a bronze plaque bears the inscription:

IN MEMORY OF THE BRAVE AMERICANS
WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES
TO ACHIEVE VICTORY IN VIETNAM

Below it are the names of the American dead. There are almost four hundred of them.

CUT TO:

61. EXT. MILITARY INSTALLATION - NIGHT

The Rockefeller Military Research Center - LAURIE's home sweet home. Her car pulls up to the guard's booth and he waves her through. As soon as the chain-link gate rolls back into place behind her, the GUARD picks up a phone and punches in a number.

62. EXT. RESEARCH CENTER - NIGHT

LAURIE strides up a concrete walkway at the entrance to the complex, fumbling in her purse for a mag-stripped ACCESS CARD. She inserts the card into a slot at the door. Nothing happens.

She tries again. Still no luck. Just then, a long black car pulls up behind her - and a uniformed officer, MAJOR ADAMSON, steps out.

LAURIE

Major Adamson. I can't seem to get in the door.

ADAMSON

Laurie, I'll have to ask you to come with me.

LAURIE

Why? What's the problem?

ADAMSON

I can't tell you that. It is quite urgent.

LAURIE

(chuckling)

I would like to use the bathroom -

As she speaks, TWO ARMED GUARDS come marching up the walkway.

ADAMSON

The access code's been changed. Your card won't work any more.

LAURIE

What?!

ADAMSON

Please.

The major puts a firm hand on her elbow and leads her off. The GUARDS stand at attention, then fall in behind them as they pass.

ADAMSON holds the car door open. LAURIE's climbing inside when she sees something which turns her confusion into outright panic.

The entrance to the research center has just opened -- and emerging from it, onto the walkway, are a half-dozen men in FULL RADIATION SUITS.

63. INT. MEDICAL LAB - NIGHT

LAURIE enters with full military escort. The troops hand her off to a team of DOCTORS and LAB TECHNICIANS, then drop back to stand guard at the door. A brusque NURSE presents her with a short white gown:

NURSE

Miss Juspeczyk. Put this on, if you would.

LAURIE

What - ?

DOCTOR

Drink this.

The DOCTOR hands LAURIE a glass full of iridescent green fluid. She stares at it, still somewhat nonplused.

DOCTOR

Drink it.

64. INT. MEDICAL LAB - ANTEROOM - NIGHT

TECHNICIANS monitor a series of computer screens. On the screens are shifting, multicolored GRAPHICS PATTERNS representing the interior of a human body as seen from a variety of angles. A leaded window opens on:

65. INT. MEDICAL LAB - NIGHT

We're watching what looks like an electronic sarcophagus. A donut-shaped housing traverses its length repeatedly, head to foot, foot to head, sending a three-dimensional readout telemetrically to the anteroom.

Through a glass panel in the sarcophagus we see LAURIE, her head wedged into a fixed metal brace, eyes darting fitfully left and right as she wonders just what the hell is going on.

68. INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

A MAN'S HAND slides a photograph across a table.

LAURIE (O.S.)

That's Col. Brent Dabbs. Jon's military liaison.

LAURIE, still dressed in the white gown, is seated at a table surrounded by GOVERNMENT AGENTS in three-piece suits. Chief Agent SCHMIDT nods at his cronies and replaces the photo with another taken from a thick sheaf.

LAURIE (cont.)

Dr. Candelaria. He works on one of Jon's research teams. The quantum-whatever.

SCHMIDT lays a third photo before her. It's a group shot of the Watchmen - the same picture that hung in BLAKE's closet. LAURIE hesitates.

LAURIE (cont.)

That's Jon. Obviously. And me. Adrian Veidt.

(long pause)

Rorschach . . .

SCHMIDT

Their real names, please.

LAURIE

I don't know their real names.

SCHMIDT

You're lying, Miss Juspeczyk.

LAURIE

I don't know their real names!

SCHMIDT

You're not "protecting" anyone. These people's lives may depend on the answers you give.

(holding up the sheaf of photos)

These are all former associates of Dr. Manhattan--

LAURIE

Then why don't you ask him?!?

Furious, she pushes herself away from the table and moves to a nearby window. The AGENTS exchange cool glances. Like all experienced torturers, they understand the value of patience.

LAURIE (cont.)

I want to get dressed. - And I'd like a cigarette.

One of the AGENTS pulls a pack from his coat, shakes a cigarette out for LAURIE. As he's lighting it – a perfect gentleman – the door opens and a LAB TECHNICIAN enters with a clipboard.

He passes the clipboard to SCHMIDT, who examines its contents – and tilts an eyebrow. LAURIE, looking on, is about to burst with curiosity:

LAURIE (cont.)

Someone had better tell me what's going on here!

SCHMIDT

Sit down, Miss Juspeczyk. As I mentioned, the people in this file are all close associates of Dr. Manhattan. They have something else in common as well.

(beat)

They've all developed a fairly . . . exotic form of lymphatic cancer.

LAURIE

What are you saying? That Jon is radioactive?

All at once, the obvious hits home – and LAURIE's face goes bone-white. SCHMIDT nudges the clipboard toward her. Trembling, she takes it . . . then sets it down, staggered by what she's read.

SCHMIDT

I'm terribly sorry.

LAURIE

What does this mean? What does it –

SCHMIDT

Six to eight months. That's with treatment. – Perhaps now you can see why it's so vital that we locate your . . . friends.

LAURIE

That's it. This is all a trick, isn't it? Some kind of horrible joke to make me –

She scans the room. No one's laughing. SCHMIDT gets up, signals to his comrades, and heads for the door.

SCHMIDT

Take a day or two. If you "remember" any names . . . do give us a call.

The AGENTS leave, and LAURIE sits alone in the office. She reaches for the clipboard and takes another long hard look. Then, quaking, she buries her face in her hands.

67. INT. OBSERVATION ROOM - THAT MOMENT

A darkened room just off the office; LAURIE is visible through a two-way mirror. The door opens, and MAJOR ADAMSON - who's been watching all along - is joined by SCHMIDT.

ADAMSON

Poor kid.

SCHMIDT

We'll keep her in isolation awhile. She'll give us some names.

ADAMSON

To hell with those costumed idiots. I'm worried about Doc Manhattan.

SCHMIDT

What do you mean?

ADAMSON

She's his last link to humanity. Once she's gone . . . God knows which way he'll jump.

DISSOLVE TO:

68. INT. HOTEL ROOM - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY

DR. MANHATTAN stands in front of a full-length mirror. He's wearing a navy-blue double-breasted suit, a white shirt, and a maroon necktie with an irregular mauve pattern.

The tie doesn't quite suit him. His brow wrinkles, and the tie magically transmutes into a more sedate wine-red job with diagonal gold stripes.

Too staid. DR. MANHATTAN frowns, and the tie transforms itself into a handsome royal-blue number with tiny hydrogen atoms for decoration.

It does nice things for his complexion. Satisfied, he turns from the mirror, starts for the door, and DEMATERIALIZES.

69. INT. TELEVISION STUDIOS - DAY

TECHNICIANS running to and fro. A harried DIRECTOR checks the green room, where the STAFF is beginning to panic.

DIRECTOR

We're on the air in five minutes. Where the hell is that big blue son of a -

He stops, wisely, in mid-sentence. DR. MANHATTAN has just rematerialized inside the studio, two feet from the DIRECTOR's face.

DR. MANHATTAN

I'm sorry. Am I late?

DIRECTOR

No problem. We'll have to head straight for the set. - Oh, I'm Kent Turner, the director. . . .

The DIRECTOR shakes DR. MANHATTAN's hand and marches him down a hallway. Within seconds they're joined by a GOVERNMENT LIAISON.

LIAISON

Dr. Osterman. I've got a list of taboo areas here we'd like you to steer clear of. Obviously, Afghanistan will come up, but if you'll just play it cool -

DIRECTOR

Doc, that blue of yours tends to wash out on camera. Could you give us something a little darker . . . ?

DR. MANHATTAN pauses briefly. His skin tone darkens two shades.

DR. MANHATTAN

Will this do?

DIRECTOR

Perfect.

LIAISON

Now Doc, please - on this Afghanistan thing -

But the good doctor is already at the edge of the set, surrounded by a cluster of SOUND MEN, PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS, etc., who are hurriedly prepping him for the telecast. The frustrated LIAISON hangs back and glances up at an OVERHEAD MONITOR. The 'ABC NEWS SPECIAL REPORT' graphic is already onscreen, with THEME MUSIC underneath.

70. INSERT - TV MONITOR

Stock footage. We open on a shot of terrified Viet Cong racing for their lives through a dense jungle; the camera WHIP PANS to the right and takes in an extraordinary sight.

A towering, ninety-foot-tall DR. MANHATTAN strides blithely through the jungle, occasionally directing a blast from his fingertips at the greenery below. AMERICAN HUEYS hover behind him, spitting out bursts of automatic fire, performing mop-up duty as this one-man defoliation crew does his apocalyptic thing. A SUPERIMPOSED TITLE reads: "VIETNAM. 1965."

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Dr. Manhattan: the nuclear titan spawned in a freak scientific mishap. For more than twenty years the "Manhattan Option" has been the linchpin of America's conventional strategy -

We CUT to PRAGUE, where RUSSIAN TANKS are rolling through a broad thoroughfare. DR. MANHATTAN, only forty feet tall this time, rounds a corner and emerges from behind a municipal building.

His EYES gleam eerily, and the lead tank begins to HEAT UP, the gray gunmetal turning red before our eyes. The hatch springs open, STEAM hisses, and TERRIFIED RUSSIAN SOLDIERS clamber out - only to be met with a barrage of ROCKS thrown by the local citizenry. Title reads: "CZECHOSLOVAKIA. 1968."

ANNOUNCER (V.O., cont.)

- in trouble spots from Vietnam to Czechoslovakia to Nicaragua: a one-man cavalry coming to the aid of our democratic allies, holding the Communist menace in check.

DANIEL ORTEGA, in Sandinista drabs, sits at a table across from American Secretary of State G. Gordon Liddy. The two men shake hands, hold up a signed treaty for the camera. DR. MANHATTAN, in a three-piece suit, stands behind them, presiding over this historic accord. Title: "NICARAGUA. 1979."

ANNOUNCER (V.O., cont.)

In the famous words of General William Westmoreland, "Yes, Virginia, there is a Superman - and thank God, he's American."

71. INT. SOUNDSTAGE - A MOMENT LATER - DAY

A sparse, businesslike talk-show set: two chairs, a table, a backdrop of the Washington monument, and a gallery full of MEDIA PEOPLE. Jaded news vet DAVID BRINKLEY is manning the host's chair.

BRINKLEY

For this live question-and-answer session we'll be joined by correspondents from all three networks. But since I am moderating, I'll ask you to keep your questions short and snappy.

(turning)

Now let's welcome our special guest, Jonathan Osterman . . . better known as Dr. Manhattan.

Applause from the crowd. ANGLE WIDENS to include Doctor M, seated at BRINKLEY's right. He nods in acknowledgement.

BRINKLEY (cont.)

I suppose the topic on everyone's mind this week is Afghanistan, where Russian tanks appear to be poised for a massive invasion. Now since you've dealt successfully with similar situations in the past . . . I'll ask you point-blank: has the administration requested that you intervene?

DR. MANHATTAN

I will not intervene in Afghanistan.

A HUBBUE goes up among the crowd.

72. ANGLE ON MILITARY LIAISON

looking on from offstage. He rolls his eyes in frustration.

73. ANGLE ON SET - BRINKLEY AND DR. MANHATTAN

HANDS are already shooting up among the NEWSMEN in the audience. BRINKLEY ignores them:

BRINKLEY

You're saying you would refuse a direct request?

DR. MANHATTAN

There will be no request. I will not intervene.

BRINKLEY

Well, Doctor, it's widely understood, or rumored, that you can actually see the future. Does your answer indicate that the hostilities in Afghanistan will blow over?

74. ANGLE ON MILITARY LIAISON

He's steamed, but like everyone else in the studio he's hanging on DR. MANHATTAN's every word. He turns apprehensively to a COLLEAGUE in the shadows behind him -- and snaps his fingers once:

LIAISON

I want a phone line to the booth. Now.

75. ANGLE ON BRINKLEY AND DR. MANHATTAN

DR. MANHATTAN

I see the future only as it relates to me. I have no control over it.

(long pause)

I can only repeat . . . that there will be no request . . . and I will not intervene.

He sits there like a big blue Buddha. BRINKLEY shrugs and presses on.

BRINKLEY

Well, then - I hope we can take that as an optimistic sign. I'll open up the floor to questions now. Doug?

REPORTER

Dr. Osterman, I'm Doug Roth of Nova Express. I'd like to read you some names: Col. Brent Dabbs, Dr. J. M. Candelaria, Wallace M. Weaver . . . do these names have any meaning to you?

DR. MANHATTAN

All friends, yes. Associates of mine.

ROTH

Let me go on. Stephanie Boris, William Charles Batts, Susan White. Are you aware that these "friends" and "associates" of yours have all been diagnosed with terminal cancer?

The CROWD NOISE begins to build. Even BRINKLEY's taken aback. He gapes at DR. MANHATTAN - who sits there silently, his inhuman face an unreadable mask.

76. ANGLE ON MILITARY LIAISON

eyes wide, hand cupped over the in-house telephone.

LIAISON

Oh Jesus.

(barking into phone)

I want this broadcast killed. I'll run out on that goddam set if I have to!

77. ANGLE ON SET - BRINKLEY, ROTH, DR. MANHATTAN

ROTH

I have here an official list of sixteen names, all similarly diagnosed. Now, for the record, Doctor - is there a connection?

By now, the crowd is about to erupt - ROTH is shouting to make himself heard over the din. BRINKLEY, who's just gotten a message from the booth, touches his headset and announces:

BRINKLEY

I'm told it's time for a break. We'll be back after this brief message -

Within seconds the MILITARY LIAISON has rushed out onto the set, flanked by two COLLEAGUES in mirrorshades.

LIAISON
 • THAT DOES IT! NO MORE QUESTIONS!
 SHOWS OVER!!

The three of them all but yank DR. MANHATTAN out of his seat. Then, PANDEMONIUM breaks loose as eager NEWSMEN bolt the gallery and MOB THE SET.

RANDOM NEWSMEN
 Dr. Manhattan! Are these allegations true? Do you cause cancer??

DR. MANHATTAN
 I don't wish to answer any questions.

RANDOM NEWSMEN
 You see the future! Did you know in advance –

LIAISON
 The Doctor will not answer your questions. Now
 STEP ASIDE!!

The LIAISON and his boys form a wedge in front of DR. MANHATTAN, but the mass of bodies and microphones is all but impenetrable.

RANDOM NEWSMEN
 How long have you known – why is the government concealing this information –

DR. MANHATTAN
 Please get out of my way.

The LIAISON throws an elbow, knocking a REPORTER to the floor. SCUFFLING breaks out. Just as it's getting vicious, DR. MANHATTAN lets out a THUNDEROUS SHOUT:

DR. MANHATTAN
 I said LEAVE ME ALONE!!

In the wink of an eye, the soundstage is EMPTY – no newsmen, no microphones, no cameras – nothing but the lone figure of DR. MANHATTAN and, still sitting in the chair behind him, BRINKLEY.

BRINKLEY swallows hard and fidgets with his necktie. A moment later, there's a ANGRY FLASH of WHITE LIGHT – and DR. MANHATTAN VANISHES, leaving BRINKLEY alone on the deserted set.

CUT TO:

78. INT. RESEARCH CENTER - LIVING QUARTERS - NIGHT

The place has been pretty well torn apart; MAJOR ADAMSON is overseeing a crew of technicians in white suits as they post quarantine notices at the entrances. He's not altogether surprised when DR. MANHATTAN rematerializes at his side.

DR. MANHATTAN

Where's Laurie?

ADAMSON backs off slightly. He's not wearing a radiation suit, and he's understandably reluctant to get any closer than absolutely necessary.

ADAMSON

She's been relocated, Jon. It's strictly precautionary . . .

DR. MANHATTAN

There's no need to lie. I assume she's been tested. Were the results positive?

ADAMSON hesitates for the briefest of seconds.

DR. MANHATTAN (cont.)

Don't bother. I already know what you'll say.

He watches impassively as what's left of his home is dismantled. His mind is already a million miles away.

ADAMSON

Jon, I know this is presumptuous, but . . . if you wanted to . . . could you cure her?

DR. MANHATTAN

I don't know. I only know that I won't.

(long pause)

There'd be no point. It's finally begun.

ADAMSON

'Begun'? What's begun?

DR. MANHATTAN

I've seen this day. It's the day I've been dreading all these years.

ADAMSON doesn't know what he's talking about, but a chill runs down his spine nonetheless.

ADAMSON

Jon - when you said you wouldn't go to Afghanistan . . .

DR. MANHATTAN (cont.)

My work here is finished. God be with you, Major.

And with that, he VANISHES. His double-breasted suit he leaves behind; it hangs in midair for a moment, then crumples into a pile at the Major's feet.

ADAMSON

Good Lord --

CUT TO:

79. EXT. OUTER SPACE

-- and it's about as exterior as you can get. We're a few hundred miles above earth; the curvature of the globe is readily apparent from this height, and the surface looks placid and eerily beautiful -- oceans and continents overlaid by a pattern of shifting white clouds. From frame right, a BLUE FIGURE swings into view, eclipsing our planetary vista and disappearing again off frame left.

It's DR. MANHATTAN. He's in a lotus position, sitting on nothingness, calmly scanning the globe from his orbital vantage. Stars twinkle behind him as he looks down on the planet he's about to leave, his normally-inscrutable features tinged with regret.

80. EXT. ARIZONA DESERT - NIGHT

Black sky hangs over an empty stretch of desert -- so desolate, so barren and otherworldly that it could pass for Mars. Could, that is, until we see the residue of man's presence on the landscape: ruined quonset huts, roofless, long since abandoned to the elements, half-buried in drifts of sand; military vehicles, little more than husks now, rusty and gutted; and a sign, dangling awkwardly from a rotted upright -- GILA FLATS TEST BASE.

A gecko skitters across the sand and pauses. Above it, a sudden RUPTURE appears in the night sky, bathing the sands in blinding blue light. The gecko runs wildly as DR. MANHATTAN steps through the rift in the sky and descends gently to earth.

The rupture heals itself, and the desert is dark and peaceful once more as DR. MANHATTAN trudges across the sands toward the ghost town of Gila Flats. He wanders through the ravaged doorway of what was once a canteen: tables are overturned, bottles broken, but the long mahogany bar, though pitted and scarred, stands intact.

A desert rat scurries down its length as DR. MANHATTAN looks on. We MOVE IN on his emotionless glowing EYES and

DISSOLVE TO:

81. INT. CANTEEN (FLASHBACK) - DAY

It's twenty-odd years ago, and we're looking at DR. JONATHAN OSTERMAN -- a big, boyish, clean-cut guy of twenty-six, dressed in a necktie and a white lab coat. He's at a table sipping a mug of beer, wearing a dopey smile as he gazes out of frame at his lunch companion:

JANEY SLATER (O.S.)

Nineteen million for the intrinsic field disruptor.
You'd think they could at least make us a decent
hamburger.

JON laughs, looks sheepishly down at his hands. He's utterly smitten with DR. JANEY SLATER, his colleague at the test base; she's a couple of years older than he, and pretty, in a heavily-coiffed way -- just close enough to LAURIE that you'd notice the resemblance. And she's probably the only one in the room who can't see just how bad a crush JON has on her.

JON

I'll say. If we ever get off this looney-tune project,
I'm gonna head straight for civilization and buy me
a big thick steak.

JANEY

With lots of ketchup?

Smiling, she indicates JON's plate. He's emptied at least half a bottle on his french fries.

JON

Nothing wrong with ketchup.

JANEY

Jon Osterman, you don't act like a Princeton boy.
What's a big lug like you doing in a place like this?

JON

Anything for science, I guess.
(long, hesitant pause)
Janey, there's something --

JANEY

(simultaneously)
We should get back --
(realizing she's cut him off)
What?

JON

Nothing. What were you going to say?

JANEY

We should get back to the lab.
(staring at him; chuckling)
 You okay, Jon?

He stares at his hands, afraid to meet her eyes. After a moment he pipes up:

JON

Oh, yeah. You go ahead. I'll be right behind you.

The lad seems a little screwy today. JANEY shrugs, gets up and heads for the door. JON takes a moment to collect himself, then looks after JANEY. She's paused in the doorway to unbuckle her wristwatch.

His face goes a little pale. He screws up his courage, rushes up behind her. .

JANEY

Stupid watch. Stopped again. Do you have the -

JON

(blurting it out)
 Janey, will you marry me?

She turns and looks him squarely in the face. He's wearing the pained expression of a convicted murderer waiting to hear the verdict.

JANEY

Jon - what?

JON swallows hard, and the two of them stare at each other, eyes locked. For a moment it's as if they're the only souls in the canteen. But just then two SCIENTISTS come busting through the door, clipboards in hand, deep in a conversation of their own; and one of them - DR. WALLY WEAVER - walks smack into the startled JANEY, causing her to drop her wristwatch.

There's a loud CRUNCH. JON and JANEY snap out of their private trance as WALLY bends to retrieve the watch.

WALLY

Christ, Janey, I think I stepped on your watch.

JANEY

Oh Wally, don't feel bad. It was cheap, it never worked anyway -

JON

I can fix it.

JANEY

- What??

JON

My dad's a watchmaker. I'll put it back together for you. Better than ever.

He holds out his hand. Their eyes meet for a long moment.

WALLY

Take him up on it. It'd make me feel better.

Chuckling, WALLY and his colleague head off to find a table. JANEY hands JON the watch; his hands close around hers, and he gazes at her with basset-hound eyes. She realizes he's still waiting for his answer.

But before she can speak, JON produces a small BOX from his pocket. He thrusts it abruptly into JANEY's hands -

JON

Here. I - I'll trade you.

- and hustles off. She opens the box, finds an ENGAGEMENT RING. With a little smile she tries it on, and turns to show JON - but he's already gone.

She stares at the ring. Her smile broadens.

82. INT. LABORATORY - DAY

JON's at a lab table, papers stacked all around him. In the center of the table is a piece of black velvet strewn with JEWELER'S TOOLS.

It's his lunch hour, and he's fixing JANEY's watch. He tightens the central screw which holds the hands in place, then fits the crystal into its housing and gives it a light tap.

With a big, childlike grin of satisfaction - the boy's in love, remember - he gets up and starts for the door. The lab is jammed with oversized, arcane machinery; the centerpiece is a concrete TEST CHAMBER with two-foot thick metal walls. Mounted on either side of it are PARTICLE CANNONS - great bulky devices which look like anti-aircraft guns encircled by huge plexiglass coils.

He stops, spots his lab coat hanging on a peg in the corner, and walks over to grab it. As he's putting it on, he hears a tiny SQUEAK from the direction of the test chamber.

Mounted above the chamber is a DIGITAL CLOCK - hours, minutes, seconds, tenths of seconds. Just now it's 13:58 and change. JON eyes the clock, hesitates briefly, then grabs a broom and steps to the reinforced steel door of the chamber.

Inside, the chamber is empty but for a concrete block mounted on a low platform - and a MOUSE, which scurries into the corner when it hears JON

coming. He steps inside, sets JANEY's watch on the concrete block, and swings the broom at the mouse.

JON

C'mon, little guy, outta here . . .

The mouse legs it out the door. JON follows, smiling, broom in hand.

JON (cont.)

. . . don't wanna screw up a million-dollar experiment.

He stops. Feels around in his pocket. Realizes he's left the watch inside.

He looks at the overhead clock again - 13:59:30 and counting. Agitated now, he races back toward the chamber, pauses in the doorway, spots the watch resting where he left it on the far side of the concrete block. He dashes inside, circles around the concrete block, reaches for the watch -

- and FREEZES at the sound of THREE WARNING BEEPS behind him.

White-faced, he snatches at the watch and ducks around the concrete block - too quickly. He nicks his shin on the projecting edge of the support platform and tumbles to the floor of the chamber.

Before his eyes, a MASSIVE STEEL DOOR is sliding into place - TRAPPING HIM INSIDE.

He LURCHES toward the door, gets a hand through. The door keeps sliding. He jerks his hand back a half-second before the door slams shut.

83. INT. LAB - ENTRY - THAT MOMENT

1300 hours sharp. A half-dozen SCIENTISTS stroll into the lab. One of them is passing out goggles - to his colleagues and a pair of MILITARY BIGWIGS who are obviously on a walking tour of the facilities.

SCIENTIST

- actually, we don't know what happens when you disrupt the intrinsic field. All we've managed to do so far is blow a few concrete blocks all to hell.

GENERAL

(joking, but worried)

No danger of . . . fallout, is there?

SCIENTIST

No sir. The chamber's radiation-proof once it's sealed. That's why we waited outside.

The translucent coils on the particle cannons have begun to glow a dull red.

The crowd draws closer, goggles in place. There's a dim, distant THUMPING.
The SCIENTISTS look at the chamber – and go slackjawed in perfect unison.

GENERAL

What's the matter?

SCIENTIST

Sweet Jesus – !

We DOLLY IN rapidly on the observation panel mounted in the wall of the test chamber – leaded glass, two feet thick. Behind it is the terrified face of JON OSTERMAN – pounding frantically on the glass, screaming soundlessly.

Pandemonium in the lab as the SCIENTISTS rush right and left, punching buttons, twisting knobs – to no avail. The GENERAL comes to a belated and painfully obvious realization:

GENERAL

Say, there's a man in there!!

The coils on the cannons have gone from red to bright yellow. One SCIENTIST stands at the observation window and SHOUTS –

SCIENTIST I

Stay calm, Jon! We'll try and kill the power!

– while another barks furiously into a wall phone:

SCIENTIST II

Building six! Kill the power! Osterman's trapped in the I.F. chamber!!

The GENERAL stands there looking rather nonplussed.

GENERAL

Well – why doesn't somebody let him out??

SCIENTIST III

It's a timelock. It can't be opened once the sequence starts.

(to SCIENTIST II)

What's the word?

SCIENTIST II

(covering the phone)

They're sending a crew to the generator building –

SCIENTIST IV

TWENTY SECONDS!

In a glass box on the wall is a fire ax – with the instructions "IN CASE OF FIRE BREAK GLASS." WALLY WEAVER, Jon's friend from the canteen, wraps his lab coat around his forearm, punches through the glass, and grabs the ax.

SCIENTIST I

Wally! What are you doing?

WALLY

The power cables!!

And now another figure enters the lab – the unsuspecting JANEY SLATER.

JANEY

Am I late for the –

She stops in midsentence at the sight of the frenzied action in the lab. SCIENTIST III spots her, grabs her, tries to push her back through the door.

SCIENTIST III

Janey! Get out of here. Get out!

But she resists. She's just spotted WALLY with his ax, poised to take a swing at a thick black cable on the floor. The cannon coils have gone from yellow to a brilliant, luminous white.

JANEY

What in the name of – where's Jon?

SCIENTIST III

Janey! Please! Go!

WALLY strikes at the cable. Nothing. He takes another whack, and a sudden jolt of current knocks him off his feet and throws him into a wall.

Sparks fly, but the process continues. The room is full of white light. JANEY, fighting her way past the SCIENTIST, gets a good look at the observation panel – and the blood drains from her face.

JANEY

Jon.

84. INT. TEST CHAMBER - THAT MOMENT

JON backs away from the glass panel, a look of disbelief on his face. He blinks; his hands fall limply at his sides; the watch, which he's been holding all along, falls to the floor and shatters . . .

. . . and everything in the room goes blue.

85. INT. LAB - THAT MOMENT

The SCIENTISTS slowly cluster around the observation panel, unable to tear their eyes away. JANEY, past hope, wanders up unsteadily behind them.

JANEY

Jon . . .

(shrieking)

JON!!!

86. INT. TEST CHAMBER - THAT MOMENT

JON's back is arched. His arms go up. His face is a mask of unbelievable agony.

A moment later, his skin is gone. A black skeleton -- like a photographic negative -- stands in his place.

Then the skeleton BURSTS . . . into its constituent atoms. The iridescent blue light has quite literally taken Jon Osterman to pieces.

And then, the test chamber is empty. The blue light begins to dim, and we're looking through the window panel at the staggered faces of the SCIENTISTS. One by one, they back away . . . leaving only JANEY, who gazes into the chamber with a blank, soulless stare.

DISSOLVE TO:

87. INT. RUINED CANTEEN (PRESENT DAY) - NIGHT

The desert rat chitters on the bar. On the partially collapsed wall behind it hangs a broken clock, which stopped some twenty years ago at 11:48 PM.

For a moment DR. MANHATTAN, even more abstracted than usual, watches the rat. Then he turns and walks through drifted sand out the door of the canteen.

88. EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

DR. MANHATTAN walks aimlessly through the rubble of the compound.

89. INT. MEN'S ROOM (FLASHBACK) - NIGHT

TWO SCIENTISTS washing their hands at the sinks. They glance up into the mirror simultaneously, and BLANCH. Behind them, a hideous *thing* is coalescing in midair -- a brain, eyes, a dangling spinal cord, wriggling neurons -- a gruesome, disembodied central nervous system.

They pivot, shrieking, just in time to see the creature evaporate in a haze of shimmering blue light.

90. EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

DR. MANHATTAN keeps on walking.

91. EXT. TEST BASE (FLASHBACK) - NIGHT

HORRIFIED SENTRIES fire their rifles, then turn and run. A partially-muscled skeleton stands by the perimeter fence and SCREAMS for several seconds before vanishing altogether.

92. EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

DR. MANHATTAN keeps on walking.

93. INT. GILA FLATS MESS HALL (FLASHBACK) - NIGHT

Dinnertime. JANEY and WALLY at a table.

JANEY

I can't help it. I'm going to quit this place. It feels
. . . it feels haunted.

WALLY

It'll be all right, Janey. You need time, that's all.

(tugging at his ear)

Do you hear some kind of - whistling?

Indeed she does, and within moments it builds to a deafening whine. Odder yet, WALLY's hair is standing on end - and so is JANEY's. Everyone in the mess hall seems to be experiencing the same freakish phenomenon.

UTENSILS rise from tables and drift magically into the air. Without warning, the overhead lights blow out - and a BRILLIANT BLUE GLOW suffuses the room. All eyes turn toward the source of the glow . . .

. . . the fully-formed figure of DR. MANHATTAN, floating above them, nude, hands spread like some majestic blue messiah. Metal trays and utensils hover in midair around him, throwing off sparks.

JANEY gapes at his face. She recognizes it instantly. Her hands go to her mouth and she lets out a horrible, endless shriek.

JANEY

JON-N-N-N!!!

DISSOLVE TO:

94. EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

THE SHRIEK DIES as DR. MANHATTAN stares up into space. He turns, stares at the ground. Nothing but sand. He stoops nonetheless and begins to dig.

A couple of inches down, he finds what he's looking for: an ancient, tattered photograph, faded almost beyond recognition. Young Jon, and Janey Slater. She's holding up her hand, showing off her brand-new engagement ring.

His fist closes around the snapshot. His eyes slowly shut.

95. SERIES OF SHOTS

Quick, almost subliminal visions of the past and future:

- JON's black skeleton, bursting to atoms in the test chamber;
- JANEY shrieking in the mess hall, her face bathed in blue light;
- LAURIE at a breakfast table, drinking coffee, reading the paper. There's a sudden flash of light; the windows shatter inward; a terrible blast of heat chars the skin off her bones . . .
- A CITY demolished by a nuclear blast, the inevitable mushroom cloud rising swiftly, blotting out the sky.

96. EXT. DESERT - ON DR. MANHATTAN

Fists still clenched, he stands - grimacing, distraught, alone in the ghostly calm of the desert. He rises into the air, slowly at first, then faster . . . finally disappearing in a sudden blue startburst a mile above the ground.

97. EXT. OUTER SPACE

All at once we're back in the starry void, hurtling away from earth at unimagined speeds . . . through empty space, past the moon, on toward Mars.

The red planet looms larger and larger, finally dominating the frame as we descend toward the chaotic terrain of the Martian surface. Individual features of the landscape grow gradually more distinct: vast canyons, oceans of fog, volcanoes the size of Missouri. Herschel's famous *canal*. And finally, the *argyre planitia*, an enormous shallow crater, its rocky rim encircling two jutting blue mountains and, to the south, a ragged, semicircular ridge.

Two eyes, a big broad smile. It looks uncannily like a happy-face.

Many miles below us, a tiny rupture opens in the Martian atmosphere. BLUE LIGHT spills out an instant before we

CUT TO:

98. INSERT - TELEVISION SCREEN

The late news, with highlights of DR. MANHATTAN's press conference. As the throng of REPORTERS shove microphones at him, we ZOOM IN on his angered face:

DR. MANHATTAN

I said leave me alone!!

Then there's a sudden CUT. We see the same REPORTERS, in the same positions, only DR. MANHATTAN is gone -- and they're all standing on the White House lawn, in the midst of a torrential downpour.

PULL BACK TO:

99. INT. ROOM - GOVT. SECURITY COMPLEX - NIGHT

A restless LAURIE watching the broadcast from an overstuffed chair. She's in a big open room with a bed and kitchenette; except for the big metal door and the bars on the windows, it could pass for a comfy furnished studio.

TV ANCHORWOMAN (O.S.)

-- in Washington, where an irate Dr. Manhattan teleported a crew of reporters into the midst of a rainstorm on Pennsylvania Avenue!

TV ANCHORMAN (O.S.)

Well, Katie, I know some politicians who'd like to learn that trick --

LAURIE turns at the sound of keys in the door. A moment later, SCHMIDT enters, followed by a pair of FEDERAL AGENTS.

SCHMIDT

All right, Miss Juspeczyk. Pack your things.

LAURIE

Am I free to go?

SCHMIDT

You're free to do whatever you goddam well please. Let's move it.

LAURIE

(fed up; exploding)

I don't know why you've been keeping me here, but you're in deep shit --

SCHMIDT

Oh, I am, honey. You see, Russian tanks are crossing the Afghan border this very minute. And we are all of us, every living soul, in deep, deep shit -- because our number-one strategic weapon has finally flipped out.

LAURIE

Jon?? You mean he's --

SCHMIDT

That's right. Your meal ticket's flown the coop.
That blue bastard has apparently left the planet.

CUT TO:

100. EXT. NEWSSTAND - DAY

The same headlines scream from every edition on the rack:

DR. MANHATTAN LEAVES EARTH
Russian Tanks Advance
President Vows 'Maximum Force'
WHERE IS DR. MANHATTAN?

And on the street, tensions are running high. The familiar NEWS VENDOR is engaged in a heated exchange with one of his CUSTOMERS:

NEWS VENDOR

I'll tell you what the problem is. We shoulda been building tanks, bombs. ICBM's! Instead we been relying on that big blue son of a bitch -

CUSTOMER

Anyone ever tell you you're full of shit?

NEWS VENDOR

Kiss my ass, buddy! Keep your goddam quarter!

VOICE

New Frontiersman, please.

The NEWS VENDOR turns suddenly, finds himself confronted by an old friend: the red-haired STREET CRAZY with the end-of-the-world sign. He rolls his eyes - this is all I need - and reaches under the counter.

NEWS VENDOR

Here you go, pal. Two bucks.

(beat)

Well, I see the world aint ended yet.

The STREET CRAZY eyes the lurid cover of his magazine. "EXPOSED: RED PLOT TO FRAME DR. MANHATTAN!"

STREET CRAZY

... How do you know?

CUT TO:

101. EXT. TENEMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

A row of decayed walk-ups in a fringe neighborhood downtown. A DRUNKEN COUPLE – a gaunt, middle-aged MAN and a blowsy, overweight WOMAN – totter down the street arm in arm. NEON SIGNS blink on and off as they mount the front steps of a seedy building, exchanging tipsy giggles.

102. INT. TENEMENT APARTMENT - NIGHT

A three-room hellhole, decor by Goodwill. A door opens, and the MAN ushers his date inside with exaggerated formality. Her name is LUCY; his is Edgar William Jacobi, but – for reasons soon to be revealed – we'll call him MOLOCH.

MOLOCH

Now. What was milady drinking?

LUCY

Gin. Straight up –
(*mock-ladylike*)
– with a little twist of lime.

She laughs convulsively, as if she's just told the world's funniest joke. MOLOCH lifts a single finger and starts toward the kitchen:

MOLOCH

I think I can oblige.

103. INT. KITCHEN - A MOMENT LATER - NIGHT

MOLOCH FREEZES in the doorway, his face taut with apprehension. The contents of his refrigerator have been strewn all over the kitchen floor – overturned milk cartons, broken eggs, the like. It's a disaster area. As he steps inside to investigate, LUCY appears in the doorway behind him – and SNORTS.

LUCY

Jeez, honey! You got some kind of animal in here?

On cue, the refrigerator door KICKS OPEN – and out pops RORSCHACH. He grabs MOLOCH by the lapels, pins him back against the kitchen table.

RORSCHACH

Moloch. Did you miss me?

LUCY

Willie! Jesus! What's going on?

RORSCHACH

(*glancing up*)
Who's the welfare mother?

MOLOCH

I don't know who you are buddy, but I swear to God, you got the wrong guy.

RORSCHACH

Edgar William Jacobi, aka William Edgar Bright, aka Moloch.

MOLOCH

You're making a big --

RORSCHACH lifts MOLOCH up slightly, then slams him down hard against the table -- repeatedly, to the beat.

RORSCHACH

Terrorist. Radical agitator. Stoolpigeon.

MOLOCH

ALL RIGHT! ALL RIGHT!! -- How'd you find me?

LUCY

Willie, what's he talking about?

RORSCHACH backs off, allowing MOLOCH to slump to the floor. RORSCHACH kneels beside him.

MOLOCH

Look, I don't know what you want, but I been a private citizen for ten years. I --

RORSCHACH cups one gloved hand under MOLOCH's chin and pulls him close. Then, for LUCY's benefit, he explains:

RORSCHACH

Turned state's witness in '75. Earned himself a brand-new face.

*(twisting MOLOCH's head to one side,
for a better look)*

Hnnrh. Butt-ugly then . . . butt-ugly now.

He shoves MOLOCH back onto the floor, then stands. There's a sugar bowl on the table; RORSCHACH spots it and pockets a few cubes as MOLOCH gets up to dust himself off.

RORSCHACH (cont.)

Comedian dead, Dr. Manhattan in exile. Obvious connection. Who's behind it?

MOLOCH

Rorschach, you're talkin' heavy-duty stuff. I got nothing to do with --

RORSCHACH

Worked both sides of the fence. Ask your old buddies in the CTU.

MOLOCH

CTU? Jesus. You don't think --

RORSCHACH

Don't know. Ask around. I'll be back.

LUCY, still unsettled, crosses to MOLOCH's side and grips his arm as RORSCHACH opens a rear window. He's climbing through the frame when he stops suddenly and points a finger at the frightened pair:

RORSCHACH (cont.)

Word of advice for the lady . . . stock up on penicillin.

-- and he's out on the fire escape and GONE. LUCY looks suspiciously at MOLOCH, who shrugs, embarrassed: I don't know what he's talking about.

CUT TO:

104. INT. PENTAGON - WAR ROOM - DAY

The familiar set from Dr. Strangelove: top brass seated at a big round table, with a huge Mercator-projection map of the world looming in BG. The Afghan-Pakistani border is highlighted in red; a MILITARY ANALYST paces in front of the big board with a penlight POINTER, highlighting areas of strategic importance.

ANALYST

Our projections show Pakistan falling within the week. From there it's sixty percent certain they'll try to take Western Europe.

GENERAL

Respectfully, sir, our NATO allies are getting itchy. They're quizzing us about the possibility of a first strike.

MOVE IN on a tall chair at the head of the table -- the back of which bears the seal of the President of the United States.

PRESIDENT

First strike.

(long pause)

I'd like to view the simulation.

The ANALYST hits a button on a remote control device.

ANALYST

Optimally . . . we could expect to wipe out some eighty percent of their retaliatory capability before they knew what hit 'em.

On the big board, BLUE ARROWS emanate from selected points in the Pacific and the Arctic Circle and veer toward Russian turf -- blossoming into yellow-and-black RADIATION SYMBOLS as they strike their targets.

PRESIDENT

What about our end?

ANALYST

Well, sir . . . in a worst-case scenario . . . we'd assume that twenty-five percent of the Russian birds get through.

On the board, RED ARROWS inch westward from Mother Russia.

ANALYST (cont.)

Britain down -- Germany down --

PRESIDENT

What kind of time frame are we talking about?

ANALYST

Thirty minutes maximum. Of course, I assume we'd be in the fortified command bunker at the time of the launch order.

RADIATION SYMBOLS sprout over New York, Baltimore, Washington, Denver, Los Angeles, San Francisco.

PRESIDENT

. . . Of course.

By now, both coasts are pretty well blotted out. The ANALYST, a dedicated optimist, turns to announce:

ANALYST

As you can see, we may be able to salvage a good-sized chunk of the farm belt.

PRESIDENT

What about the aftermath? This so-called . . . 'nuclear winter' theory?

ANALYST

We don't really know, sir, but bluntly, our survival capability . . . may depend on a quirk of the weather.

PRESIDENT

The weather. I see.

(pause)

Keep me posted. I want hourly forecasts and a full report on optimum strike conditions.

The SECRETARY OF STATE -- our old pal G. Gordon Liddy -- pipes up:

SECRETARY LIDDY

Dick, before we act hastily, we should consider . . . Dr. Manhattan may decide to return.

With a heavy heart, the Chief Executive pushes himself away from the table -- and we get our first good look at him. His face is lined and tired, his hair is flecked with white, but he's none other than that beloved statesman RICHARD M. NIXON -- still vital and robust at 74.

PRESIDENT (cont.)

Good God. At times like this I wish I'd never come out of retirement.

CUT TO:

105. INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - RECEPTION ROOM - DAY

A private practice in midtown Manhattan. LAURIE emerges from an examination room, grim and hollow-eyed; the DOCTOR hangs back in the doorway.

DOCTOR

I'm sorry, Miss Juspecyzk.

LAURIE

Not at all, Doctor. I appreciate your honesty.

106. INT. GUNGA DINER - DUSK

A greasy Indian restaurant in a Village storefront. In a booth near the entrance we find LAURIE and DREIBERG munching on chicken tandoori.

DREIBERG

Christ yes, I went in for a cancer scan first thing. Gave me a couple of rough nights, I'll tell you . . .

(pause)

How about you, Laurie?

LAURIE

(lying -- with forced cheer)

Oh, yeah. They gave me a clean bill of health and then booted me the hell out.

(shrugging)

No expense account. No place to live.

DREIBERG

You'll find something. - I should go. You and me, seeing each other, someone might put two and two together . . .

LAURIE shakes her head and laughs - mirthlessly.

LAURIE

They're not following me, Dan. I mean - Jon's gone, we're right on the brink of World War III. Nobody cares about the Watchmen.

DREIBERG

Maybe not, but why take chances?

LAURIE

Dan, what are you so scared of? I mean, me, I've spent all these years keeping Jon together, and now that it's over I feel - I feel glad. I'm finally free to, to go out and live my own life, and -

- and she's dying of cancer. The irony of it hits home, throws a damper on her little burst of optimism. Depressed again, she starts to get up.

LAURIE

I'm just running on, Dan. Thanks for dinner. I'd better go find myself a cheap room.

DREIBERG watches, paralyzed by indecision, as LAURIE heads for the door of the restaurant. Then, submitting to impulse, he gets up and chases her down:

DREIBERG

Laurie, wait. I've got a spare room. It's empty. If you'd like . . .

LAURIE

Oh Daniel, thanks, but I couldn't. You'd just be all nervous about -

DREIBERG

No, screw that. What you were saying before, it's absolutely right. - I'd love to have you stay.

LAURIE

You're sure?

He nods. She smiles and takes his arm as they walk out of the restaurant.

THROUGH THE WINDOW of a nearby booth we watch them passing on the street outside. The OCCUPANT of the booth, whose face is out of frame, fidgets restlessly with a menu and a squeeze bottle of ketchup.

He inverts the ketchup over the menu, squirts out an upside-down question mark, then closes the menu and mashes it shut. When he opens it again, he's got a makeshift RORSCHACH BLOT.

107. EXT. ALLEY BEHIND GUNGA DINER - SUNSET

A SHORT-ORDER COOK empties garbage into a can outside the restaurant, then disappears inside. Two beats later, a DARK SILHOUETTE strolls casually down the alleyway.

He moves a garbage can, finds a sheet of plywood tacked to the crumbling brick wall behind it. He pries the plywood loose, finds a small recess in the wall, then extracts a SLOUCH HAT . . . and a SHIFTING INKBLOT MASK.

108. INT. DREIBERG'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The guest bedroom is furnished in a somewhat grandmotherly style: flowered wallpaper, an old brass bed with a frilly comforter, etc. It's small but cozy, and LAURIE lets out an appreciative 'aah' as DREIBERG ushers her in.

LAURIE

This is so nice of you, Daniel. I really do appreciate it.

DREIBERG's lugging her suitcases. He sets them on the bed and stands there for a moment, looking vaguely expectant.

LAURIE (cont.)

Are you . . . waiting for a tip?

DREIBERG

Oh. No. Sorry. I'll be right down the hall if you want me. . . I mean, if you need some aspirin, or --

LAURIE

I'm gonna take a warm bath and sack out. --
You've been really sweet. Sleep tight, okay?

She gives him a sisterly peck on the cheek, then returns to her unpacking. DREIBERG watches her for a second, then turns to go.

109. INT. HALLWAY - ON DREIBERG

As he closes the door, he gets a quick glimpse, from behind, of LAURIE unbuttoning her shirt. He quickly averts his gaze and pulls the door shut.

110. INT. DREIBERG'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

DREIBERG, in pajamas, climbs into bed and kills the light. He folds his hands behind his head and stares up at the ceiling.

111. FLASHBACK - PROCESSED FOOTAGE

Another quick glimpse of derring-do. This time it's SILK SPECTRE - LAURIE - in the midst of a gang of thugs. She fights them off valiantly, but she's heavily outnumbered. She turns and runs.

An oblong shadow falls across the ground, and NIGHT OWL swings into frame; he's clinging to a rope ladder which hangs from his AIRSHIP overhead. In one smooth motion he swoops into LAURIE's path and snatches her into the air, safe from the clutches of her pursuers.

112. INT. BEDROOM - ON DREIBERG

His head turns at the sound of WATER running in the bathroom adjacent. He's going to be awake half the night thinking of LAURIE.

CUT TO:

113. EXT. STREET - DAY

Early morning. Across the street from us is a BUBBLE CAR parked in an alley. Its occupants: MOLOCH, and a straitlaced guy in a suit and crewcut. He's got a definite CTU look about him.

MOLOCH gets out, scans the street, and crosses toward the GUNGA DINER.

114. INT. GUNGA DINER - REST ROOM - A MOMENT LATER

A twitchy MOLOCH locks himself in a stall, sits on the throne, and pulls out a bindle of WHITE POWDER. He takes a couple of hits up the nose, then dips his finger in the stuff and rubs it around the edges of his EYELIDS.

His eyes water. He sniffles. He reaches for some toilet paper; bizarrely, a small BUSINESS CARD falls out of the roll. He picks it up . . .

There's a hand-scrawled RORSCHACH BLOT on its face.

A low, hissing GROWL from overhead. MOLOCH looks up suddenly - and sees RORSCHACH peering at him over the stall partition.

He GASPS and lunges for the door. RORSCHACH's arm snakes out and holds the stall door shut.

RORSCHACH.

Two things I hate: Street mimes . . . users of recreational drugs.

MOLOCH

No, no. You got it all wrong. I been on the case, Rorschach, I got something for you.

A long pause. RORSCHACH GROWLS again: let's have it.

MOLOCH (cont.)

There's a bunch of research scientists -- missing. Blake was on a case, trying to track 'em down.

(beat)

It's big, Rorschach. Something to do with Doc Manhattan. That's all I've been able to find out.

RORSCHACH

Drug habit. Highly illegal. Hnnrh.

(snarling)

Let it go this time. In future -- just say no.

With that he disappears over the edge of the stall. MOLOCH sits there a moment. He reaches for the stall door, rattles it. It won't open.

MOLOCH

HEY!!

RORSCHACH's stuck a broomstick through the door handles of the adjacent stalls. As MOLOCH POUNDS on the door in frustration, we

CUT TO:

115. INT. VEIDT'S PENTHOUSE SUITE - DAY

A plush RECEPTION ROOM in the Veidt Industries pyramid; it's decorated in the same Egyptian motifs as his office. VEIDT sits in an overstuffed chair, surrounded by VIDEO CAMERAS; he's in the process of charming JUSTINE JAMES, a fawning Barbara Walters-figure who's prepping a segment for her next celebrity-chat special.

JUSTINE

Now Adrian, I guess there's one thing everyone wants to know. Are you the world's smartest man?

VEIDT

Oh my, yes. And the best-dressed.

A round of chuckles from the video CREW. Wotta smoothie!

JUSTINE

You're certainly one of the richest. Holder of over forty basic patents -- including products that have changed our everyday lives.

(pause)

If you had one achievement you were proudest of -- what would that be?

VEIDT ponders for a second, then reaches into his jacket and pulls out his gold cigarette case.

VEIDT

Sphinx brand.

(opening the case)

When I got out of weapons design, I wanted to move into a more . . . humanitarian area. I was thinking: what would do some good in the world? And I thought: why not a genetically-altered tobacco, that not only doesn't cause cancer - but cleans out your lungs as you smoke it?

(lighting up)

In fact I think I'll have one now. Care to join me?

JUSTINE

Thanks, no. But it's a wonderful product. Now Adrian - your old colleague Dr. Manhattan has just left the planet amid rumors -

VEIDT

(bristling)

No. No. Cut. - Justine, we agreed. No questions about the Watchmen.

JUSTINE

Oh sweetheart, just a quick one.

VEIDT

No. We laid out very careful ground rules -

VEIDT is interrupted by a GROWLING NOISE from his office adjacent. He glances quickly over his shoulder, then gets back to business.

VEIDT (cont.)

- we agreed specifically -

MORE GROWLING from the next room over. The CAMERA CREW's getting curious. VEIDT gets up from his chair.

VEIDT (cont.)

Excuse me a second.

He goes to the office door and slips inside. The usually-smiley JUSTINE shoots a look of disgust at her CREW: what a prick.

116. INT. VEIDT'S OFFICE - DAY

VEIDT is shocked to find RORSCHACH down on the carpet, wrestling with his mutant LYNX. He CLAPS HIS HANDS TWICE:

VEIDT

KITTY!!

One last nip, and the cat backs off. RORSCHACH gets to his feet -- no visible signs of damage, except for a severe bruise to his dignity.

VEIDT (cont.)

How the hell did you get in here?

The curtains are flapping; a BREEZE hits VEIDT across the face. He looks up, sees a NEAT ROUND HOLE cut out of his plate-glass window.

RORSCHACH

New information.

VEIDT

(pointing to the telephone)

Ever see one of these before?

RORSCHACH

Too important for telephone. Comedian -- Dr. Manhattan. All linked up.

VEIDT

What is that ungodly smell?

RORSCHACH, abashed, lets out a timid version of his trademark HISS.

RORSCHACH

Bigger than I thought. CTU involved . . .

VEIDT

Yeah, I've heard all about your conspiracy theories. Now I've got a roomful of cameras in there. I want you out. Now.

(beat)

And whatever you're doing, knock it off. You're making us all look bad.

RORSCHACH

Fate of the world at stake, Adrian. Can't get too worked up over bad press.

He makes for the window. VEIDT frowns, adjusts his tie and exits.

CUT TO:

117. INT. DREIBERG'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

DREIBERG and LAURIE cooking dinner. DREIBERG burns his fingers on a broiling pan, which prompts a sudden round of stamping and cursing.

LAURIE watches for a minute, then shakes her head. She pours a full glass of wine and thrusts it at him.

LAURIE

Daniel - drink this. Immediately.

(smiling)

I swear, you are acting like a kid on a date.

Sucking on his burnt fingers, he reluctantly takes the wineglass.

DREIBERG

Okay, I'm nervous. It's an odd sensation. I've always had to think of you as Dr. Manhattan's -

He catches himself - too late. LAURIE glowers at him.

LAURIE

His what?

DREIBERG

His . . . whatever.

LAURIE

I'm not his . . . whatever. Okay?

She spears a couple of steaks, drops them on plates, and heads toward the dining room.

LAURIE (cont.)

Look, I just want to eat dinner and get drunk. Let's not make it any more difficult than we have to, huh?

118. INSERT - TELEVISION SCREEN

The latest bad news from half a world away:

NEWS ANCHOR

Meanwhile, in Afghanistan, the fighting continues to escalate . . .

On a televised MAP of Afghanistan, RED RUSSIAN ARROWS are working their way slowly but inexorably toward Pakistani territory.

NEWS ANCHOR (cont.)

With Russian forces approaching the border, Pakistan today called on the US to intervene. President Nixon has placed America's European military installations on full alert -

CAMERA PULLS BACK, placing us in -

119. INT. DREIBERG'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A DINING ROOM TABLE littered with crumpled napkins and dirty dishes. DREIBERG and LAURIE have just finished dinner. He stares in dismay at the TV screen as he opens a fresh bottle of wine.

DREIBERG

Good Lord. With Jon out of the picture it's a whole new ball game.

LAURIE's already a little tipsy, and the broadcast doesn't much interest her. Wine glass in hand, she's wandered over to the stereo cabinet.

LAURIE

That's right, Daniel. A whole new ball game.

(smiling)

God! I haven't seen one of these in fifteen years.

She's referring to DREIBERG's ancient TURNTABLE. Shelved beneath it are row upon row of LP's - these days, they're obsolete collector's items.

DREIBERG

I told you I was a little out of step. A lot of the old stuff I listen to - it never came out on crystal.

LAURIE

I'd say you stalled out about forty years ago.

(flipping through records)

Nellie Lutch - Louis Jordan - I've never even heard of these people.

DREIBERG

Play one. Educate yourself.

LAURIE chuckles. Her head turns at the sound of a familiar COMMERCIAL THEME. On the TV, a young woman sits at her vanity and gazes lovingly at a WEDDING PICTURE framed in silver.

LAURIE

Oh look. It's Adrian's ad.

TV CHORUS

*Oh my darling, it's incredible
That someone so unforgettable . . .*

120. INT. TENEMENT FLAT - NIGHT

MOLOCH's apartment. THE SAME COMMERCIAL is blaring from the TV as RORSCHACH lets himself in.

TV CHORUS

. . . Should think I am unforgettable too.

RORSCHACH

Moloch?

No reply from MOLOCH, who sits in an easy chair, his back to camera, seemingly glued to the tube. RORSCHACH casts a cautious glance around the room and advances stealthily toward the chair. Onscreen, the WOMAN at the vanity opens a jar and smears LIME-GREEN GOO on her face:

TV ANNOUNCER

The years melt away with NOSTALGIA. Use it once a week - and wrinkles vanish overnight. Medically tested, non-habit-forming NOSTALGIA is the patented beauty cream that actually reverses the aging process . . .

RORSCHACH

Moloch?

He creeps up behind MOLOCH, lays a hand on his shoulder.

121. REVERSE ANGLE - ON MOLOCH

staring at the TV screen with sightless eyes. There's a NEAT ROUND BULLET-HOLE in the center of his forehead. RORSCHACH sees it and spins on his heels, anticipating an ambush -

TV ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

For the smooth young face he'll never forget -

122. INT. DREIBERG'S APARTMENT - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT

LAURIE is still flipping through records. DREIBERG chuckles at the TV ad.

TV ANNOUNCER

- turn back the clock with NOSTALGIA . . . from Veidt Industries.

DREIBERG

No wonder Adrian's rich. You use that stuff?

LAURIE

Sure. It works. I mean, look at this face, Daniel. I'm thirty-eight years old!

DREIBERG

I don't mind getting older. I'm obsolete anyway. Why try to hide it?

LAURIE

I like the way you look.

(bear)

It's strange with Jon. He doesn't age. His face doesn't change. But you, Daniel, you look . . .

DREIBERG

Old?

LAURIE

Not at all. You look very - dashing.

(standing up)

Here, you pick one.

DREIBERG

. . . What?

LAURIE

Pick a record. I feel like dancing.

Her tone is unmistakably flirtatious. DREIBERG hesitates - then, with a noncommittal smile, he moves to the record cabinet.

123. INT. TENEMENT FLAT - NIGHT

RORSCHACH making a hasty exit. An AMPLIFIED VOICE booms out:

LOUDSPEAKER

RORSCHACH! THIS IS THE CIVIL TERRORISM UNIT. YOU HAVE ONE MINUTE TO COME OUT.

He goes to the window and peeks through the blinds. On the street outside, BUBBLE CARS are massing, blocking off the intersection. A CTU SWAT TEAM prepares to raid the building.

LOUDSPEAKER

YOU WON'T BE HARMED. COME OUT. IT'S ALL OVER!

He's walked into a trap. As he lets the blinds fall, ALL SOUND DIES - and a bouncy, tinkling PIANO THEME comes up underneath.

124. INT. DREIBERG'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The PIANO MUSIC emanates from DREIBERG's stereo: an old Fats Waller tune, "S'posin'." He's slow dancing with LAURIE, their faces illuminated by the cold blue flicker of the television. With a smile she reaches up to remove his glasses, then deposits them in his shirt pocket.

Dreamily, she rests her head on his shoulder. Her nearness is making him nervous. She pauses in mid-step and takes his face in her hands. He tries to

nervous. She pauses in mid-step and takes his face in her hands. He tries to look away, but she pulls his face around – so that he can't avoid her gaze any longer – and plants a soft kiss on his mouth.

The PIANO INTRO ends, and Fats' teasing vocal begins:

*S'posin' I should fall in love with you . . .
Do you think that you could love me too . . .*

125. INT. TENEMENT - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT (MOS)

SONG CONTINUES UNDERNEATH, cheerful soundtrack accompaniment to an horrific silent movie. RORSCHACH races out of the bathroom carrying a plastic MOP BUCKET, plus an armload of bottles and aerosol cans – ordinary household supplies. He enters the kitchen, rummages around under the sink, finds another handful of bottles: cleaning fluid, rubbing alcohol, Drano.

Almost as an afterthought he moves to the gas stove, turns on all the burners – and BLOWS OUT the FLAMES.

*S'posin' I should hug you and caress you . . .
Would it impress you? . . .*

126. INT. TENEMENT - FRONT STAIRWELL - THAT MOMENT (MOS)

A contingent of ARMED CTU MEN rushing silently up the stairs.

Or would it distress you? Hmm?

127. INT. TENEMENT - THAT MOMENT (MOS)

RORSCHACH dousing the living room carpet with charcoal lighter and rubbing alcohol. There's a pile of bottles – only half-emptied – resting next to the front door. The CTU COPS are pounding on the front door, trying to break it down. RORSCHACH crouches in the hallway just outside the living room.

The door finally gives way, and the COPS tumble in. RORSCHACH strikes a match and holds it to the nozzle of an AEROSOL CAN – creating a miniature FLAMETHROWER. The COP's heads swivel just as the puddle on the carpet catches – and a moment later, the PILE OF BOTTLES EXPLODES, engulfing the doorway in flame.

*S'posin' I should say for you I yearn . . .
(Yeah I yearn. Sure I do.)
Would you think I'm speaking out of turn? . . .*

128. INT. DREIBERG'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

DREIBERG and LAURIE horizontal on the sofa, their clothes in disarray. LAURIE kisses him hungrily – but he's distant, panicky, unable to respond. It's

been a long time for him. It's not going well.

*S'posin' I declare it
Would you take my love and share it?
I'm not s'posin', I'm in love with you . . .*

He wriggles beneath her. She takes his hand, presses it onto her breast.

129. INT. TENEMENT - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT (MOS)

INSTRUMENTAL BRIDGE continues UNDERNEATH as RORSCHACH backs through the kitchen with his bucket. SMOKE billows in from the living room.

He empties TWO BOTTLES OF COOKING OIL on the linoleum floor. Then he ducks through a door into the BACK STAIRWELL.

130. INT. STAIRWELL LANDING - A MOMENT LATER (MOS)

RORSCHACH opens a bottle of CLEANING FLUID, stuffs a wad of newspaper into its neck. The first wave of COPS - coughing and hacking from the smoke - makes it into the kitchen just as he IGNITES his molotov cocktail and TOSSES IT INSIDE.

The COPS pitch backward as the bottle blows up. By the time they hit the floor, the COOKING OIL has burst into flame.

RORSCHACH bolts up the stairs; by now, another squad of CTU MEN is coming up the back way behind him.

131. INT. KITCHEN - A MOMENT LATER (MOS)

Charred COPS, leaping FLAMES. CAMERA ZEROES IN on the GAS STOVE.

132. EXT. TENEMENT - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT (MOS)

A GAPING HOLE blows open in the front of the building. FIERY RUBBLE hails down on the CTU units outside. Re-enter Fats on vocals:

*S'posin' I should hug you and caress you? . . .
Would it impress you? . . .*

133. INT. DREIBERG'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

LAURIE is fumbling with DREIBERG's pants. Finally he can't stand it any more - and with a pained, stricken look he pushes her away and sits up on the sofa. His head sinks into his hands. At first she doesn't understand; then her face softens, and she moves to his side, embracing his shoulders, gently stroking his hair.

. . . Or would it distress you?

134. INT. TENEMENT - BACK STAIRWELL - THAT MOMENT (MOS)

RORSCHACH huddled on the uppermost landing, just below roof level. By now the whole building is ablaze. Two flights down, a pair of CTU COPS are fighting their way through the inferno, still on his tail.

He still has his mop bucket; it's half-full of water. He reaches for his last can - a can of DRANO - and empties it into the bucket, where it begins to HISS and SIZZLE.

*S'posin' I should say for you I yearn . . .
Would you think I'm speaking out of turn . . .*

The COPS are almost on him, racing upward two steps at a time. He steps out in front of them, and - before they can hoist their weapons - HEAVES THE BUCKETFUL OF BOILING DRANO into their faces.

The COPS SHRIEK SOUNDLESSLY and topple backwards into the flames as RORSCHACH turns tail and bursts through the door to the roof.

135. EXT. TENEMENT ROOF - A MOMENT LATER - NIGHT

RORSCHACH emerges - and a BLINDING LIGHT catches him full in the face. Hovering not twenty feet overhead is a POLICE AIRSHIP - a blimp-like craft of the sort we saw earlier. A spray of MACHINE-GUN FIRE peppers the roof.

*S'posin' I declare it.
Would you take my love and share it? . . .*

RORSCHACH scuttles along the edge of the roof, finds a rickety FIRE ESCAPE, and dives over. Unfortunately, he's now exposed on the front of the building - pinned to the wall by gunfire from the SWAT TEAM on the street. TONGUES OF FLAME dart from nearby windows. He turns and tries to climb back upward, but more COPS - from the just-landed AIRSHIP - are already spilling over the edge of the roof.

I ain't s'posin', I'm in love with you.

The song ends. And on the last note, RORSCHACH emits an ungodly HOWL OF FURY - diving over the metal railing, PLUNGING to the street below.

136. EXT. STREET - THAT MOMENT

Three stories down, he crashes into a cluster of garbage cans - and lies there, spent, twisted, wracked with pain. The CTU COPS are on him instantly, kicking him, pummeling him with billy clubs and rifle butts.

COPS
GET HIM! GET HIS MASK! LET'S SEE THE
LITTLE FUCKER'S FACE!!

RORSCHACH
GNAAAAHH!! NO!! NO!!

In seconds the inkblot mask is off -- revealing a pocked, doughy face topped off by a shock of MATTED RED HAIR. It's a familiar face . . . the face of the STREET CRAZY who haunts the newsstand with his placards announcing the end of the world.

COP
Christ. He's got five-inch heels. The fuckin' runt wears elevator shoes!

RORSCHACH
NO!! NO!! GIVE IT BACK!!

He kicks and claws at the COPS as they drag him unceremoniously off to a nearby van.

COP II
So that's the terror of the underworld. That ugly little zero.

RORSCHACH
GIVE ME BACK MY FACE!!!

The van doors slam shut on RORSCHACH -- just as the first FIRE TRUCKS arrive to turn their hoses on the flaming skeleton of the tenement.

CUT TO:

137. INT. DREIBERG'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

DREIBERG and LAURIE stretched out on the sofa, under a blanket. He stares up at the ceiling, still troubled.

DREIBERG
I'm sorry, Laurie. I --

LAURIE
It's all right, Dan. I just want you to hold me, okay?
-- Just hold me.

For a few moments she lies nestled peacefully against his chest. His gaze drifts over to the TV. Suddenly he BLANCHES.

LAURIE
Daniel. What --

On the TV screen is a huge bluescreen closeup of RORSCHACH. DANIEL reaches for the remote control to turn up the volume.

TV ANCHOR

. . . A ten-year manhunt ended tonight with the capture of the masked vigilante known as Rorschach. Eight CTU men died in the violent confrontation at a downtown tenement . . .

The news report CUTS LIVE to the smoking wreckage of the tenement.

LAURIE

Eight cops? Oh, great. A jury's gonna love that.

DREIBERG

Are you kidding? If they put him in jail he's dead. He'll never get to trial.

Now the screen shows side-by-side closeups of the inkblot mask and the acne-scarred face beneath it. LAURIE looks on, transfixed.

TV ANCHOR

. . . identified as Walter Joseph Kovacs, 44, a transient with a history of psychological disorders. A former landlord described Kovacs as a self-confessed loner and political extremist:

LANDLORD (ON TV)

All kinda weirdo literature, paraphernalia . . . you shoulda seen that place when I threw him out. Talk about piggins -

LAURIE hits the mute button, settles back and lets out a low whistle. DREIBERG, distracted, pours a glass of wine and gets up to pace the room.

LAURIE

I just realized. I'd never seen his face.

(beat)

I guess it was just a matter of time. He's totally - Daniel? What's wrong?

DREIBERG

The Comedian . . . Jon . . . now Rorschach.

He stares at her, obviously wondering: who's next?

138. EXT. NEWS KIOSK - EVENING

The familiar NEWS VENDOR peddling papers. A feisty little BLACK KID - the same one who made a face at RORSCHACH - sits on the pavement nearby, reading a comic book.

The NEWS VENDOR nudges him, indicates the comic book: a patriotic little number entitled "COLONEL NORTH AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS."

NEWS VENDOR

Hey, this ain't a lending library. I expect you to pay me for that.

KID

No way. This one sucks.

A CUSTOMER - 50, black, on the tubby side - stops at the newsstand. His name is DR. MALCOLM LONG.

DR. LONG

Gazette, please.

The NEWS VENDOR hands over a copy of the Gazette. The cover bears side-by-side photos of RORSCHACH and his alter ego, KOVACS, with the banner headline: "CTU APPREHENDS MASKED KILLER."

NEWS VENDOR

'Dyou see this? This guy's a customer of mine!
(shaking his head)

I mean, I always knew he was a little flaky, but - wild, huh? You never know.

LONG hands over a quarter, unfolds the paper and begins to read as he wanders off down the street.

139. INT. STUDY - NIGHT

DR. LONG, who happens to be a police psychiatrist, sits at a big desk with a vast heap of paperwork - which includes a mug sheet of RORSCHACH (minus the mask) and a neatly-typed arrest report from the NYPD:

NAME:	Kovacs, Walter Joseph
ADDRESS:	Transient
BORN:	3/21/43
MOTHER'S NAME:	Kovacs, Sylvia J. (nee Glick)
FATHER'S NAME:	Unknown

By now LONG is working on his third pot of coffee. His wife, SYLVIA, wanders in behind him, dressed for bed in her robe and slippers. When she rests her hands on his shoulders, he nearly jumps out of his seat.

DR. LONG

Oh! Sorry. I didn't hear you.

SYLVIA

How much longer?

(staring down at the desk)

It's that vigilante, isn't it. That -

DR. LONG

Rorschach.

(correcting himself)

Kovacs. Incredible case. Blinded two children at the age of ten. We pulled his record from the juvenile home -

Without looking up he shoves a sheaf of papers in SYLVIA's direction.

DR. LONG (cont.)

No father. Mother a prostitute. Some evidence of systematic child abuse . . .

(swivelling to face her)

Classic case of misplaced aggression. You know, these vigilantes, these 'Watchmen' - there's never been a systematic study to find out just what makes them do it.

SYLVIA

Malcolm, don't get too - overwhelmed by all this.

SYLVIA picks up a blurry xerox of a child's drawing: TWO HIDEOUS FIGURES, male and female, with wild eyes, fangs, and matted hair. They're conjoined like Siamese twins at the mouth, belly and crotch. This twisted vision of coitus bears the crayoned title "MY DREAM by W. J. Kovacs, Age 13."

It's too strong to look at for long. She sets it down with a shiver.

SYLVIA (cont.)

Why don't you come to bed?

DR. LONG

(totally engrossed)

I'd like to get my hands on some of the others.
Explosive material.

(grabbing a transcript)

Mother died when he was fourteen. When they told him, he had one word of comment: "Good."

SYLVIA shoots him a hard look, shakes her head almost imperceptibly, and gives up. She turns and pads silently out of the room. LONG goes right on talking, unaware that his audience has left.

DR. LONG (cont.)

Still, he's not stupid. In some ways he's got an extraordinary mind. I think I can reach him.

(nodding his head)

I can reach him.

CUT TO:

140. INT. PRISON INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

A bare, windowless chamber, 10' by 10'. LONG and RORSCHACH sit in folding chairs on opposite sides of a square table. The doctor reaches into his briefcase and pulls out a stack of CARDS.

DR. LONG

Now, Walter, you obviously know what these are.
I want you to look at each card in turn and tell me
what it reminds you of. All right?

RORSCHACH's face is bruised, bloodied, and blank. DR. LONG turns up the first card, a symmetrical inkblot - part of a Rorschach test.

RORSCHACH

Butterfly.

LONG nods, makes a notation on a pad, turns up the next card.

RORSCHACH (cont.)

Some nice flowers.

LONG eyes him skeptically, makes another note, turns up the third card. RORSCHACH stares at it for a long moment.

RORSCHACH (cont.)

A doggy. A big old floppy-eared dog.

He shows the hint of a smile. DR. LONG heaves a sigh of frustration.

DR. LONG

Walter -

RORSCHACH

Don't call me that.

DR. LONG

Walter - you're just telling me what you think I
want to hear.

RORSCHACH

Wrong answers?

DR. LONG

There's no right or wrong. But if you don't give me
an honest response, I can't help you.

(pause)

I want to help you. I want to know all about you.

RORSCHACH

Hnnrr. - Like to masturbate. Shit once a day.

LONG knows the standard procedure for intransigent cases like this. He shrugs indifferently, reaches for his briefcase, then gropes under the table and presses a buzzer to summon the guards.

DR. LONG

Well, then. Have it your way, Walter. Let me know when you decide to cooperate.

TWO PRISON GUARDS enter through a steel door. RORSCHACH gets up to leave. He pauses in the doorway.

RORSCHACH

Doctor. You don't want to help me. You just want to find out what makes me sick.

(beat)

You'll find out. -- You'll find out.

CUT TO:

141. INT. VEIDT INDUSTRIES PYRAMID - DAY

A huge open atrium on the ground floor, with marble columns, fountains, eucalyptus trees -- an Egyptian pleasure garden. JUSTINE's hanging out with her video crew; they spot VEIDT on the central escalator and swing into action.

JUSTINE

Adrian! Adrian! Can you give us a comment on Rorschach?

He's not at all happy to see her. His FLUNKIES -- bodyguards and secretaries -- form a wedge around him as he tries to push past the cameras.

VEIDT

No comment.

JUSTINE

Did you know he was back on the streets?

VEIDT

I did not. Now get out of my way!

JUSTINE

Isn't it true that you --

He keeps walking, with JUSTINE in hot pursuit. Then, wide-eyed, he STOPS IN HIS TRACKS. An ARMED GUNMAN has stepped out from behind a pillar -- directly into VEIDT's path.

ASSASSIN

VEIDT!

VEIDT DIVES. The ASSASSIN'S BULLET catches JUSTINE in the gut and comes out the other side in a spray of blood. With a gymnast's agility VEIDT rolls to the right - and comes up with a BRASS ASHTRAY in his hands.

He swings it into the ASSASSIN'S RIBS, knocking him backward into a FOUNTAIN. The GUN skitters off across the marble floor.

As the SECURITY STAFF races up, VEIDT steps INTO THE FOUNTAIN and slams the dazed ASSASSIN's HEAD into a decorative bust of King Tut.

VEIDT

Son of a bitch. Who sent you?

Arms flying, the two men grapple. VEIDT grabs hold of the ASSASSIN's hair and thrusts a HAND into his MOUTH.

SECURITY GUARD

Stand back, Mr. Veidt! We'll handle it!

VEIDT

He's got some kind of poison capsule. Don't bite down, you scum, I want to know who sent you!

The ASSASSIN gags - and GOES LIMP. His lifeless body slumps down into the water. VEIDT steps out, shaken and breathless.

VEIDT

Goddammit . . .

SECURITY GUARD

Who'd wanna kill you, Mr. Veidt?

VEIDT

I don't know. I don't know. -- Get an ambulance for Miss James.

CUT TO:

142. INT. DREIBERG'S BEDROOM - DUSK

TIGHT ON a portable TV tuned to the evening news.

NEWSCASTER

-- third day of rioting in major European capitals amid escalating fears of nuclear war. In London, six people were trampled outside St. Paul's cathedral when overflow crowds were turned away from morning Mass --

A PHONE RINGS. DREIBERG, who's sprawled on his bed watching the TV, reaches for the receiver.

DREIBERG

Yeah.

(beat)

Adrian! What's up?

143. INTERCUT VEIDT AND DREIBERG

VEIDT

I have something to tell you. I wanted to call before you heard it on the news.

(beat)

Someone tried to kill me today.

For a moment DREIBERG says nothing. He's not altogether surprised.

DREIBERG

Who?

VEIDT

I don't know, but . . . in the wake of all that's happened, I'm starting to think Rorschach may have been right. Is Laurie okay?

DREIBERG

She's with me.

VEIDT

Good. Be careful, Daniel, don't let up your guard.

(beat)

Look, I'm going to head south for a while -- hole up at Karnak until all this blows over. You two would be welcome to join me.

DREIBERG

Thanks for the offer, Adrian. I'll let you know.

He hangs up and weighs his options while he stares at the box. LAURIE enters from the hallway, dressed in a bathrobe, toweling off her hair.

LAURIE

Ohh. I could use some dinner. Who was that on the phone?

DREIBERG

One more down. Someone tried to kill Adrian.

(beat)

. . . First time I've ever heard him scared.

He doesn't say any more than that. He doesn't have to. LAURIE picks up on the implications immediately. She exhales sharply, turns away from him and steadies herself against a bureau.

DREIBERG

- What is it?

LAURIE

I know what you're thinking. You'd be a lot safer if I weren't around.

DREIBERG

Laurie -

LAURIE

I'm an open target, Dan. If you're with me -

DREIBERG

With any luck, the world'll end before we get ours.

His sour wisecrack starts her trembling - almost crying. DREIBERG, fed up with his own pessimism, climbs out of bed and walks over behind her.

LAURIE

I shouldn't be here anyway, Daniel. There's something I haven't told you -

But before she does he shushes her, wraps his arms around her from behind.

DREIBERG

Laurie, I'm not afraid. I want you with me. I want it more than anything else in the world.

CUT TO:

144. INT. PRISON MESS HALL - NIGHT

CONVICTS lined up with metal trays at a long cafeteria-style serving area. RORSCHACH enters in prison greys. As he makes his way toward the dinner line, we PICK UP a chorus of comments from the nearby tables:

VOICE

Hey Rorschach. You dead, man. Just a matter of time now -

VOICE II

Rorschach. Better put some meat on that pretty ass of yours -

Low, threatening CHUCKLES all around as an expressionless RORSCHACH picks up his tray. A TRIO OF GOONS falls in behind him. The smallest of them outweighs him by a good forty pounds.

GOON I

Didn't know he was such a tiny little thing.

GOON II

Little? Naw, he's a big man. Big man.

RORSCHACH'S FACE shows no emotion. He moves forward in the line. A SERVER drops a gristly chunk of meat on his tin plate.

GOON III

I'd like to get his autograph. I got my autograph book right here . . .

GOON III reaches into his pocket and withdraws an ICEPICK.

GOON III (cont.)

Notched up some big names over the years.

Suddenly RORSCHACH spins, catching GOON III's head with the edge of his dinner tray. The icepick clatters to the floor. GOON III follows.

The others are on him in an instant, PINNING HIM against the serving counter. Instead of resisting, RORSCHACH vaults backward. He brings a KNEE up into GOON II's chin, grabs a fistful of GOON I's hair, and tumbles back OVER THE COUNTER - dragging GOON I's head, face down, into a steam tray full of bubbling SOUP.

Landing on his feet, keeping his grip on GOON I's hair, RORSCHACH uses his free hand to bury a FORK in a CAFETERIA WORKER's gut. GOON II lunges at him across the counter. He grabs a VAT off an nearby burner and, with a single sweep of the arm, DOUSES both GOONS - with HOT COOKING FAT.

All this has taken five seconds maximum. WHISTLES shriek as the two disfigured GOONS writhe on the floor in hideous agony, faces cracked and smoking. CAFETERIA WORKERS clear a path as PRISON GUARDS rush in with billy clubs drawn.

As the GUARDS haul him off, RORSCHACH emits a ferocious HISS. It sounds uncannily like the sizzle of boiling oil on human flesh.

CUT TO:

145. INT. MAXIMUM SECURITY WING - NIGHT

A prison TRUSTY wheels a cart down a long, empty corridor - delivering dinner to the prisoners in solitary confinement. Some of the cells are visible, through ordinary barred entries; others are totally sealed off, with sliding service trays mounted in solid metal doors.

At a cell of the latter kind, the TRUSTY knocks once on the door, then throws back a small panel to reveal the impassive face of RORSCHACH.

TRUSTY

Hey Rorschach. Those cats you threw the grease on - they're dyin', man.

(bear)

Their friends are talkin' 'bout it. Say if those two go under . . . this place blows.

RORSCHACH emits his trademark HISS and turns from the door. The TRUSTY chuckles in anticipation.

TRUSTY (cont.)

I'd hate to be you, man. Locked in here with the likes of -

RORSCHACH

I'm not locked in here with them. They're locked in here with me.

With that, the panel slides suddenly SHUT in the TRUSTY's face.

CUT TO:

146. INT. PRISON INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

LONG and RORSCHACH have changed rooms. The new room - two chairs, a square table - is identical to the first, except for the REINFORCED WIRE MESH which spans its width, separating doctor from patient.

Through a narrow opening in the wire, DR. LONG slides a card across the table for RORSCHACH's inspection. It's the same series of inkblots as before, the 'butterfly' leading off. But this time, the subject has decided to cooperate:

RORSCHACH

A whore fucking.

DR. LONG

Who is she? Do you know her?

Too obvious; no response. LONG moves on to card #2 - the 'nice flowers':

RORSCHACH (cont.)

Man's guts. Falling out of his shirt.

LONG clears his throat almost imperceptibly and nods. Card #3:

RORSCHACH (cont.)

Doggy. Big old floppy-eared dog -

(pause; then, smiling)

- with his skull split open.

DR. LONG

And what - split - the dog's skull open?

RORSCHACH

Why, doctor. I did.

(beat)

He was a bad dog.

RORSCHACH is toying with him now. DR. LONG gets down to brass tacks.

DR. LONG

Walter. This compulsion of yours - to punish transgressors. In your mind . . . what gives you the right to judge?

RORSCHACH

God isn't there to do it.

DR. LONG

We don't know that.

RORSCHACH eyes him for a moment, then nods sagely: oh yes we do.

DR. LONG

So the rest of the world is wrong, and you're right. Is that it?

(no response)

You tried to help people once. What turned you around? - Why would you want to kill a dog?

With LONG firmly on the hook, RORSCHACH settles back to elucidate:

RORSCHACH

One night I opened my eyes - saw the world.

147. EXT. WAREHOUSE DISTRICT - DUSK (FLASHBACK)

NIGHT FALLS on ruined buildings with broken windows and crumbling walls. The streets are empty, silent except for the distant sound of dogs BARKING. RORSCHACH'S NARRATION continues OVER SCENE:

RORSCHACH (V.O.)

75. Kidnap case, the little Franco girl. Weeks dragged by - no word. Thought of little child, alone, frightened . . . decided to intervene.

The lone figure of RORSCHACH emerges from the shadows and turns up his collar. He strides deliberately down the sidewalk past a ramshackle wooden storm fence covered with obscene graffiti.

RORSCHACH (V.O., cont.)
Got a tip. Abandoned dress factory in Brooklyn.

He peers through a broken slat in the fence. In a side yard, TWO HUGE GERMAN SHEPHERDS growl playfully, fighting over some unseen object.

148. INT. DRESS FACTORY - DUSK (FLASHBACK)

A DOOR swings open and RORSCHACH enters. He pockets a metal file, flicks on a flashlight.

Mannequins, decrepit sewing machines, rolls of rotting fabric. The light shines on a small, dank cot in the corner. RORSCHACH wanders over. He finds opened tins of food, an overturned water glass - and, on the floor, a ROPE.

There's a pot-bellied stove nearby. RORSCHACH crouches beside it, sticks a hand inside, and sifts through the ashes; he pulls out a charred scrap of FABRIC from a child's pajamas, decorated with balloons and teddy bears.

He stands. In the opposite corner of the room is a big wooden CHOPPING BLOCK. RORSCHACH wanders over and examines the surrounding paraphernalia: a cleaver, a bone saw, an assortment of butcher's knives. He stands there a moment, then moves to a wire-mesh WINDOW.

RORSCHACH (V.O., cont.)
Dogs wouldn't shut up. That's when I knew where the little girl had gone.

149. HIS POV - THE YARD OUTSIDE - DUSK (FLASHBACK)

The German shepherds romp in the dying light. We CLOSE IN ON the dogs until we see what it is they're tussling over: a BIG BLOODY KNOB OF BONE.

RORSCHACH (V.O., cont.)
Decided to wait for the owner . . .

150. INT. FACTORY - ENTRY - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Keys in the lock. A moment later, the door swings wide; a FAT MAN enters and whistles to the dogs.

FAT MAN
Fred? Barney? Dinner!

RORSCHACH steps out of the shadows and BASHES HIM OVER THE HEAD.

151. INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

RORSCHACH, master of suspense, decides to take a break in the story. He leans back in his chair. Finally DR. LONG, dreading his reply, asks:

DR. LONG

Then what happened?

RORSCHACH

... Made a little trip to the butcher store. Locked up tight. Had to break in.

152. INT. FACTORY - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

The FAT MAN squirms on the floor, a gag in his mouth. He's handcuffed to an exposed pipe. RORSCHACH strides into frame with a GROCERY SACK.

He kneels beside the FAT MAN and loosens his gag. Then he peels off his glove and reaches into the sack.

FAT MAN

What - what are you d-

RORSCHACH silences the FAT MAN by cramming a fistful of RAW HAMBURGER into his open mouth. He's got several pounds of the stuff, and he spends the next few seconds SMEARING IT all over the FAT MAN's face, throat, and hands, stuffing the leftovers down his shirt. When he's done, he reaches into the sack for a big plastic bag full of STEER BLOOD ... and EMPTIES IT over the FAT MAN's head.

FRANTIC SCRATCHING from outside. RORSCHACH strolls over to the door, and - as the FAT MAN wriggles in helpless terror - lets the dogs inside.

Then he stands back and enjoys the carnage.

153. INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

DR. LONG looks on goggle-eyed as RORSCHACH cheerfully wraps things up.

RORSCHACH

When they finished eating, picked up a cleaver ... split their skulls. Died happy. Full bellies.

(leaning forward)

See, God didn't kill the little girl. Or the man who killed her ... or the dogs, or me. If God saw what any of us did, he didn't seem to mind.

DR. LONG

That man, then, he was the first. The first you -

RORSCHACH

Saw the world that night - random, empty, hideous. God didn't make it that way. We did. We make the world - in our own image.

(slight smile)

What else can I illuminate?

LONG's had enough. He reaches for the concealed buzzer and the PRISON GUARDS file in. RORSCHACH gets up; before he turns to go, he points a finger at LONG's inkblot.

RORSCHACH (cont.)

No right and wrong, Doc. You said so. Maybe not a dog. Maybe . . . just a man's face.

(pause)

See it now?

The GUARDS drag RORSCHACH out. DR. LONG, still queasy, empties a couple of pills from a bottle and gulps them down dry. After a second he reaches for his briefcase; as he's gathering his cards, he STOPS suddenly - his gaze riveted to the random, symmetrical pattern on the top of the stack. It seems to SHIFT before his eyes.

LONG blinks, swallows hard. We MOVE IN tighter and tighter on the Rorschach blot, INKY BLACKNESS filling the screen as we

DISSOLVE TO:

154. EXT. BARN - TOWARD DUSK

A rural tree-lined area outside the city. A COMPACT BUBBLE-CAR pulls up outside a big ramshackle barn and stops; DREIBERG gets out, goes to the padlocked doors, fumbles in his pocket for a key.

After a moment, LAURIE wanders up behind him.

LAURIE

Enough is enough, Daniel. Where exactly are we?

DREIBERG

Memory lane.

He opens the padlock, ushers LAURIE inside.

155. INT. BARN - A MOMENT LATER

Inside the barn is a HUGE OBLONG SHAPE covered with a TARPAULIN.

LAURIE

Daniel . . .

DREIBERG

Gimme a hand with the tarp, would you? You take that side.

She goes around and bends to unfasten the tarp. The two of them pull it back to reveal . . .

THE OWLSHIP - NIGHT OWL's high-tech HOVERCRAFT. It's a bit tarnished from years of disuse, but it's still an impressive sight. DREIBERG stands back to admire it; an impressed LAURIE wanders around to join him, wearing an ear-to-ear grin.

LAURIE

The Owlship. I can't believe it.

DREIBERG

- I thought it was time for a routine maintenance check.

156. INT. OWLSHIP - THAT MOMENT

The two of them enter. DREIBERG sits at the controls and turns on the electrical system while LAURIE wanders through the cabin, reliving days gone by.

LAURIE

Wow, this brings back some memories. Does it still fly?

DREIBERG

I took her out a couple of summers back. Scared the hell out of some cows. - I wonder if she'd make it down to Antarctica.

LAURIE

Antarctica??

DREIBERG

Adrian's headed down to his secret retreat. He invited us to come along.

(pause)

I've been thinking. If things do get nasty . . . it wouldn't be a bad place to sit out a war.

LAURIE

Would you want to sit out a war? I mean - what would be left?

DREIBERG

You and me.

He looks directly at her. Suddenly uncomfortable, she averts her gaze, gets up, and begins rummaging around in the back of the cabin. DREIBERG turns back to the control panel, feeling subtly rejected.

DREIBERG

. . . Yeah, you're right. Probably wouldn't make it down there anyway.

Behind him, LAURIE lets out a little SQUEAL of delight. She's just opened a compartment door, inside it are a handful of GAUDY COSTUMES - their old superhero togs.

LAURIE (cont.)

Dan! The spare costumes! I can't believe you kept them.

DREIBERG

Me neither. Mine barely even fits.

(chuckling)

It's thing is, I try to remember why we did it, and I can't. Helping people, or righting wrongs, or trying to save the world . . . I don't know. It all seems so abstract.

LAURIE's holding her old costume up against her shoulders, eyeing herself in a small mirror above a sink.

LAURIE

God, you sound like Jon. - Turn around.

DREIBERG

What are you up to?

LAURIE

Don't look. Turn around.

Smirking, he complies. LAURIE begins to undress in the back of the cabin.

DREIBERG

This'd better not be what I think it is.

LAURIE

Okay!

DREIBERG turns around. LAURIE's in full costume, looking quite imposing and, in a perverse way, quite beautiful. He feigns shock:

DREIBERG (cont.)

My God, it's the Silk Spectre - scourge of the underworld, defender of the weak!

LAURIE

In the flesh.

She ambles over to the control panel, embraces DREIBERG from behind, and strokes his thinning hair.

LAURIE (cont.)

Poor Daniel. You really miss it all, don't you.

DREIBERG

Saving the world? I guess I do.

(smiling)

Maybe we can still save ourselves . . .

DISSOLVE TO:

157. EXT. SOUTH STREET SEAPORT - DUSK

A massive PEACE RALLY downtown. Thousands of citizens have turned out; PLACARDS and PROTEST SIGNS are everywhere. Each remark is met by CHEERS and CHANTS, by raucous BOOS as well . . . and while the crowd is split between pacifists and hawks, they're all frightened as hell.

Things are much the same in London, Berlin - possibly even Moscow. The end is nigh, and passions flare. It's anarchy waiting to happen.

MAN ON STAGE

You know what the Joint Chiefs of Staff are doing right now? They're sitting in the Pentagon talking about a first strike. That's right - a first strike!

VOICE IN CROWD

You think the reds ain't doing the same thing?

MAN ON STAGE

Then for the love of God let's negotiate. We can start a war. But we can't stop it!

VOICE IN CROWD II

It's pinko simps like you that drove Dr. Manhattan to Mars!

VOICE IN CROWD III

Dr. Manhattan was an inhuman fascist!

VOICE IN CROWD IV

It's God's judgment! Jesus is the way!

A HECKLER fights his way onstage and lunges for the microphone:

HECKLER

Russia's just been waiting for an opening. They won't show us no mercy. I say NUKE 'EM NOW!!

MAN ON STAGE

You think this is some kind of grudge match?? We're talkin' the end of the world!!

The two of them grapple at the mike, and the HECKLER falls off the stage. On cue, the crowd ERUPTS. FIGHTS break out; COPS start swinging rifle butts.

As PRO-NUKERS swarm the stage, our gaze turns upward. A trio of HOVER-CRAFT hangs in the air above the seaport. Their undersides - outfitted with heavy artillery on turrets - bear the initials 'CTU.'

158. INT. CTU HOVERCRAFT - THAT MOMENT - DUSK

CTU MEN watch the nascent riot through a plexiglass canopy.

CTU CAPTAIN

I've had it with these a-holes. Drop the gas.

159. EXT. SEAPORT - THAT MOMENT - DUSK

PANIC among the crowds as TEAR GAS CANISTERS explode in their midst. The CTU ships descend ever closer to the ground.

LOUDSPEAKER

CEASE AND DESIST AT ONCE. WE WILL NOT
HESITATE TO USE FORCE.

A couple of COPS go down in the melee. RIOTERS grab their rifles, turn them on the CTU ships overhead. OTHERS in the crowd fling rocks, brickbats - whatever's handy. HYSTERIA RULES.

CUT TO:

160. INT. BARN - DUSK

DREIBERG walks around to the front of the Owlship with a TOOLKIT, wiping his hands on an oily rag. He calls inside to LAURIE:

DREIBERG

Guess that ought to do it. Let's shut her down. -
Laurie?

No reply. Curious, he climbs aboard.

161. INT. OWLSHIP - THAT MOMENT

LAURIE's standing by the monitor over the instrument console. Her face is distraught, agonized.

LAURIE

Daniel, you ought to take a look at this.

Onscreen, it's total screaming chaos. CANNONS on the bellies of the CTU HOVERCRAFT swivel randomly, spitting AUTOMATIC FIRE at the mobs below.

DREIBERG

What the hell - ?

LAURIE

It's a peace rally. The CTU's just opened fire on the crowd.

DREIBERG

Oh, Laurie. Jesus. No.

He turns away, paralyzed with horror. LAURIE watches awestruck.

LAURIE

They're just mowing 'em down.

(pause)

This it is. The end of the world. This is what it looks like.

CAMERA MOVES IN CLOSE on DREIBERG's stricken face as we

CUT TO:

162. FLASHBACK - PROCESSED FOOTAGE

We're back in slo-mo sepia land, the Golden Age of Superheroes. THE OWLSHIP emerges from a fogbank and rises majestically into frame, like the Seventh Cavalry arriving to save the day. As it draws closer, the perspex canopy coming into view, we can just make out NIGHT OWL at the helm, with SILK SPECTRE riding shotgun.

There's a FRENZIED MOB below, racing right and left, their aimless motions stylized and surreal. They're beset by a sudden WINDSTORM as the Owlship's powerful BLOWERS clear the TEAR GAS from this fantasy equivalent of the seaport plaza. Faces turn skyward; fingers point -

- and suddenly, the footage we're watching undergoes a SUBTLE TRANSFORMATION. COLORS bleed in; SOUND comes up; the pace of the action QUICKENS. And when we cut back to the ship overhead, we're in full-color and real-time -

163. AERIAL SHOT - ON OWLSHIP

- because the Owlship is really there . . . and by God, the Watchmen are back in action a quarter-mile above the South St. Seaport!

164. INT. OWLSHIP - THAT MOMENT

The three CTU SHIPS are now visible through the cockpit dome.

DREIBERG

Oh, ay Laurie, let's see if we've still got what it takes.

On the panel, a COMPUTER TARGETING DEVICE homes in on a CTU SHIP.

165. INT. CTU HOVERCRAFT - THAT MOMENT

A RADAR MAN stares at his console in puzzlement.

CTU RADAR MAN

Sir, we've got an odd blip off starboard . . .

The ship ROCKS VIOLENTLY as a sudden EXPLOSION -

166. AERIAL SHOT : ON CTU HOVERCRAFT

- BLOWS THE CANNON MOUNT CLEANLY OFF ITS UNDERSIDE!! The ruptured ship WOBBLES, trying to right itself, but to no avail; jets sputtering, it lurches toward the harbor and SLAPS DOWN HARD against the water.

167. ANGLE ON CROWD

pointing at the skies in disbelief.

VOICE IN CROWD

LOOK! UP THERE!

VOICE IN CROWD II

Oh my God, it's -

168. INT. OWLSHIP - ON DREIBERG

He barks into a microphone:

DREIBERG

Attention CTU! Cease fire immediately -

169. EXT. SEAPORT - THAT MOMENT - DUSK

Ground level. From the midst of the bewildered CROWD we watch as the OWLSHIP and the CTU talk some serious trash:

OWLSHIP LOUDSPEAKER

- or we'll BLOW YOUR ASSES OUT OF THE SKY!

CTU LOUDSPEAKER

UNREGISTERED CRAFT. IDENTIFY YOURSELF.

OWLSHIP LOUDSPEAKER

BABY . . . WE'RE A BLAST FROM THE PAST.

The crowd's in a frenzy. Most of them are taking it on the lam. But a dozen hardy souls are standing stock-still, transfixed by the strange sight overhead.

VOICE IN CROWD

. . . IT'S THE WATCHMEN!!

EXCITEMENT RIPPLES through the CROWD as the CTU SHIPS bob in the air, clumsily turning to face their attacker. Soon the ships are hanging immobile in midair, squaring off face-to-face, a Wild West showdown. On the prows of all three craft, MISSILE LAUNCHERS rotate into position.

-170. INT. OWLSHIP - THAT MOMENT

DREIBERG with his hand poised on the throttle.

DREIBERG

We're gonna have to shave this one close.

An instant before the CTU rockets FIRE, DREIBERG shoves the throttle FULL-FORWARD.

171. AERIAL SHOT - ON OWLSHIP

With a burst of flame, the Owlship BLASTS OFF. The TWO ROCKETS CONVERGE on the point where the OWLSHIP was hovering a millisecond before - and COLLIDE. BOOM. The OWLSHIP, meanwhile, HURTLES FORWARD - slicing DIRECTLY BETWEEN the two CTU SHIPS. The CROWD CHEERS.

172. INT. OWLSHIP - A MOMENT LATER - NIGHT

DREIBERG rides the JOYSTICK. LAURIE watches a monitor showing the aft view from the ship.

LAURIE

They're following us.

DREIBERG

All right. Mission accomplished.

He's no sooner said it than MACHINE-GUN FIRE peppers the rear of the ship. He arcs hard left and DROPS, taking evasive action.

173. EXT. WORLD TRADE CENTER - NIGHT

The OWLSHIP streaks between the twin towers. A second later, the CTU SHIPS rip past on either side.

174. EXT. STREET - NIGHT

ASTONISHED PEDESTRIANS GAPE at the bizarre DOGFIGHT above them. The OWLSHIP doglegs around a darkened office building. A CTU MISSILE blows a HOLE in its facade.

175. AERIAL SHOT - ON OWLSHIP

firing TWO MISSILES aftward at the pursuing craft.

176. INT. OWLSHIP - THAT MOMENT

DREIBERG exhilarated. LAURIE, worried, checking the radar readout:

LAURIE

Missed 'em, Dan. You're aiming high!

DREIBERG

I don't want to take 'em out. Just want to keep 'em interested.

LAURIE

(checking the monitor)

They're practically on us . . .

DREIBERG

That Detroit shit? I'm so worried.

He punches a button on the dash. It's labelled "TURBO."

177. AERIAL SHOT - ON AIRSHIP

The turbojets kick in and the Owlship ACCELERATES to 400 mph, leaving the CTU craft in the dust.

178. EXT. HOLLAND TUNNEL - NIGHT

A line of TRAFFIC enters the tunnel. The Owlship SWOOPS suddenly, and - just clearing the arch - ENTERS ABOVE THEM.

A moment later, the LEAD CTU SHIP tries to follow. Bad move. The less-maneuverable craft rams into the LIP of the arch - and EXPLODES.

The SECOND CTU SHIP hurtles toward a similar fate. But at the last moment - retro-jets blasting at full force - it manages to STOP ITSELF. It backs up slightly, edges up OVER the tunnel, and settles for the airborne route.

179. INT. HOLLAND TUNNEL - A MOMENT LATER

The OWLSHIP zooms through the tunnel, mere feet above the tops of the cars. HORNS HONK. BRAKES SCREECH.

There's an oversized TRUCK directly in its path. The OWLSHIP nudges UP slightly - and clears the truck by INCHES, throwing off SPARKS against the roof of the tunnel.

180. INT. OWLSHIP - THAT MOMENT

The end of the tunnel is coming up fast.

DREIBERG

Fog blowers on. Activate radar shields.

181. EXT. HOLLAND TUNNEL - OPPOSITE END - NIGHT

The OWLSHIP emerges from the tunnel and noses UPWARD at an almost-vertical angle, spewing DENSE CLOUDS OF BILLOWING FOG in its wake. A few seconds later, the lone remaining CTU ship arrives - but, seeing only FOG and no trace of the OWLSHIP, it pushes forward on a horizontal course and disappears into the darkness beyond the water.

182. INT. OWLSHIP - A MOMENT LATER - NIGHT

They're in the middle of a cloudbank. DREIBERG is wearing a look of intense satisfaction as LAURIE nervously checks the radar.

LAURIE

We lost him.

He flashes her a smug little smile. LAUGHING UNCONTROLLABLY, she shakes her head and buries her face in her hands.

LAURIE (cont.)

Oh, Daniel . . . we are in deep shit now.

FADE THROUGH TO:

183. INT. PRISON MESS HALL - NIGHT

The usual assortment of jailbirds lined up with trays in the serving line. A PRISON TRUSTY, in hospital-orderly whites, enters the hall and falls in at the end of the line. He nudges the CON in front of him:

TRUSTY

Just left the infirmary. Lost Otis about twenty minutes ago.

The CON nods, and whispers to the man in front of him. The news goes through the serving line like wildfire. Within a matter of seconds, it's reached the jailbird at the front of the line - a hulk named T-BONE.

CON IN LINE

Otis went down.

T-BONE nods and carries his tray to a nearby table, where a cadre of SIX ENORMOUS THUGS are munching away. Presiding over them is the biggest man in the pen - who happens, ironically, to be a MIDGET: LITTLE BIGGER.

T-BONE

Just heard, boss. Otis bought it.

LITTLE BIGGER
 Fuckin' Rorschach.
(nodding to himself)
 This joint goes up. Tonight

184. EXT. AERIAL SHOT - ON OWLSHIP - NIGHT

Drifting lazily through a cloudbank. The blunt prow of the owship emerges gradually from a shroud of fog and catches a shaft of pale blue moonlight.

185. INT. OWLSHIP - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT

Through the cockpit window the distant city skyline glimmers, then disappears again behind wisps of cloud. We're taking a dreamy tour of the stratosphere, slow and elegant. Somewhere, Billie Holliday is singing "You're My Thrill."

Instruments blink and beep on the panel. No one's at the controls.

The ship lurches. A wine bottle tips and rolls noisily across the width of the cabin floor. A woman's hand reaches for it, sets it right.

It's LAURIE, who's midway through a two-minute kiss with DREIBERG. The pair of them are locked in a tight, post-coital embrace on the cabin floor, their clothing in heaps around them.

LAURIE
 Better. Much better.

DREIBERG starts to say something, settles back with a serene smile instead.

LAURIE (cont.)
 I bet I know what made the difference this time.

DREIBERG
 What?

LAURIE
(smirking)
 The costumes. Am I right?

DREIBERG seems mildly shocked by the proposition. Then, despite himself, he starts to choke. She pokes him playfully on the arm.

LAURIE (cont.)
 Come on. Admit it!

DREIBERG
 No way. I'm not that much of a pervert.

LAURIE
 Yes you are.

DREIBERG

(dryly)

No offense, Laurie, but it was Silk Spectre I had the crush on.

(pause; then, seriously)

Tonight was the first time I've felt like myself in ten years.

LAURIE

That's because --

DREIBERG

It's because there's nothing to be afraid of anymore. The world's about to end.

(a weird smile)

I feel like I could save it.

He grabs his cloak, wraps it around him, and moves purposefully to the instrument panel. He throws a few switches, arcs the Owship hard right.

LAURIE

You're full of yourself. What are you doing?

DREIBERG

Long as we're on the subject of perverts . . .

(turning to face her)

I miss Rorschach. Let's spring him.

LAURIE

. . . What??

DREIBERG -- rejuvenated, exhilarated, smiling ear to ear -- reaches for the throttle and kicks the ship into overdrive.

186. EXT. AERIAL SHOT - NIGHT

AFTERBURNERS belch flame as the Owship accelerates, ripping through the clouds above the city.

CUT TO:

187. SERIES OF SHOTS - THE PRISON

-- and as Sly Stone once said, there's a riot goin' on. SIRENS HOWL as we get several quick glimpses of gleeful CONVICTS running wild: disabling guards, overrunning cell blocks, liberating weapons, throwing food.

188. INT. OWLSHIP - THAT MOMENT

DREIBERG and LAURIE, back in full costume. DREIBERG's eyes are riveted to a monitor over the controls:

DREIBERG

I think we're just a trifle late.

LAURIE

Jesus, Dan. Out of the frying pan . . .

The MONITOR shows a magnified view of the PRISON COMPLEX below them. The prisoners have taken the quad, and are exchanging fire with the guards in the watchtower. It's an ugly, bloody mess.

DREIBERG

I know he's totally bugfuck, but he saved my life a half a dozen times.

189. INT. CELL - NIGHT

SIRENS BLARING everywhere. RORSCHACH sits on his bunk, his legs drawn up before him, his eyes darting swiftly around the cell.

190. INT. MAXIMUM SECURITY BLOCK - NIGHT

Smoke and confusion; ESCAPED CONVICTS racing to and fro past sprawled, unconscious GUARDS. In the midst of all the chaos, FOUR MENACING FIGURES stride purposefully through the cellblock. It's the psychotic midget LITTLE BIGGER, with his three henchmen CARLOS, RAFF, and T-BONE.

Wheeling an oversized ELECTRICAL ARC WELDER before them, they stop outside RORSCHACH's cell and GRIN in anticipation.

LITTLE BIGGER

Find an outlet for this thing.

(shouting)

Rorschach? I did fifteen years because of you.
It's payback time!

RAFF finds an outlet and plugs in the arc welder. CARLOS is carrying a big nasty MEAT CLEAVER; he slides back the panel in RORSCHACH's door, rattles the cleaver noisily in the frame.

CARLOS

See this, runt? We're gonna take your puny little balls off . . . and pickle 'em!

(chortling)

Aww! I think he just wet his pants!

HILARITY all around. T-BONE shoves CARLOS aside and takes his place at the panel in the door.

T-BONE

Lemme see. Lemme see!

LITTLE BIGGER

Relax, boys. Everybody gets a slice of turkey -
but I get to carve.

(to T-BONE)

What's he doin' now?

No response from T-BONE, who stands there with his face pressed tightly to the panel.

LITTLE BIGGER (cont.)

You deaf? I said, what's he -

He gives T-BONE a nudge. T-BONE's legs buckle and he topples over backwards, landing flat as a board on the floor. A SOUP SPOON quivers in the air, its sharpened handle buried deep in his eye socket.

RAFE

BOSS! JESUS!

LITTLE BIGGER

Son of a bitch! - WE'RE COMING, RORSCHACH.
WE'RE GONNA PEEL YOU LIKE A GRAPE.

(to RAFE)

Light the torch.

RAFE ignites the arc welder and the boys go to work on the lock of RORSCHACH's cage.

191. INT. CELL - THAT MOMENT

RORSCHACH waiting patiently on his bunk. The metal lock on the inside of the cell door is beginning to glow a dull red.

CUT TO:

192. INT. OWLSHIP - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT

DREIBERG hands LAURIE what looks like a pair of electronic EARMUFFS.

DREIBERG

Okay, I'm turning on the screamers. We'll have to
hit the roof running . . .

He throws a switch on the control panel.

193. EXT. PRISON COMPLEX - A MOMENT LATER - NIGHT

WINDOWS SHATTER in the guard towers as a WAILING ULTRASONIC SCREECH splits the air. On the roof of the complex, PARALYZED GUARDS drop their weapons; ESCAPED PRISONERS clutch at their burst eardrums as the Owlship descends and gently touches down . . .

194. INT. RORSCHACH'S CELL - THAT MOMENT

The LOCK is bright red and smoking. Over on the bunk, RORSCHACH'S FACE is lined with exertion. His back is wedged tight against the wall of the cell, his legs straining against the lip of his TOILET.

Grunting and groaning, he manages to knock the TOILET off its mounting. The PIPES SPEW. Within seconds, the FLOOR of the cell is FLOODED.

195. INT. CELLBLOCK - OUTSIDE DOOR - A MOMENT LATER

RAFE kills the arc welder and stands back.

RAFE

Okay, boss, that oughta do it.

They give the door a shove. It swings inward, and GALLONS OF WATER come gushing out. LITTLE BIGGER steps back in disgust.

LITTLE BIGGER

WHAT THE -

RAFE and CARLOS gape into the cell. They see the broken toilet, but there's no trace of RORSCHACH.

CARLOS

Rorschach. Company's calling . . .

RAFE

Where is the fuckin' runt?

CARLOS advances cautiously toward the cell, the CLEAVER in his fist.

196. INT. CELL - THAT MOMENT

In answer to RAFE's question, RORSCHACH is hiding behind the door. He SLAMS IT SHUT on CARLOS' outstretched hand; the red-hot metal of the LOCK catches CARLOS' WRIST; he SHRIEKS and drops the cleaver . . .

. . . giving RORSCHACH just enough time to SNATCH IT UP. He JUMPS, monkey-like, and STANDS POISED ON HIS BUNK as the door swings wide and an enraged CARLOS charges in, clutching his scorched forearm.

CARLOS

YOU'RE MINE NOW, YOU LITTLE -

From the bunk, RORSCHACH FLINGS the cleaver. It strikes the floor BETWEEN RAFE and CARLOS -

- NEATLY SEVERING the POWER CORD of the ARC WELDER -

- which is SITTING in an INCH OF STANDING WATER. RAFE and CARLOS do a herky-jerky DANCE as 20,000 VOLTS course through their bodies -

- and PITCH face-down into the water. All lights in the cellblock DIM and DIE.

LITTLE BIGGER backs off in gibbering horror as RORSCHACH climbs down off his bunk, emerges from the cell and calmly steps over the bodies of the dead.

RORSCHACH

Your move . . . unt.

The midget kingpin lets out a SCREAM and tears off down the corridor as fast as his stubby little legs will carry him.

197. INT. PRISON CORRIDOR - A MOMENT LATER

DREIBERG and LAURIE move down a dark, abandoned corridor, trying to get their bearings.

LAURIE

Where are we? What happened to the lights?

DREIBERG

Generators'll kick on in a minute. We should be close to solitary . . .

Their heads turn toward the end of the passage, where a SECOND CORRIDOR crosses the one they're standing in. As they watch, a SCREAMING MIDGET sprints past - and disappears.

DREIBERG and LAURIE blink in disbelief: huh? A moment later, a familiar figure with BRIGHT RED HAIR strides past.

DREIBERG

. . . Rorschach??

RORSCHACH pauses. He stares at his costumed colleagues for a second and a half - then keeps on walking.

198. INT. PRISON - CROSS CORRIDOR - A MOMENT LATER

The terrified LITTLE BIGGER realizes he's hit a dead end. He throws a glance over his shoulder, sees RORSCHACH moving up on him. Desperate, he ducks into a MEN'S ROOM.

RORSCHACH follows, his pace measured and deliberate. Behind him, LAURIE and DREIBERG have just rounded the corner into the cross corridor.

LAURIE

Rorschach! Is that you??

He turns and holds up a finger: one moment, please. Then, calm and dispassionate, he enters the MEN's room. DREIBERG and LAURIE stand at the end of the corridor, mildly boggled.

LAURIE

What's he doing?

DREIBERG

I think he's going to the john.

LAURIE

My God! We bust him out of jail, in the middle of a riot, and he stops to take a -

Before she can finish, RORSCHACH reemerges, wiping his hands on a paper towel. He wanders up to join them without so much as a 'howdy.'

DREIBERG

. . . That was quick.

RORSCHACH

Toilet clogged. Short fat turd.

(beat)

Let's get out of here.

CUT TO:

199. EXT. AIRSTRIP - NIGHT

A well-concealed RUNWAY somewhere in the heart of the Rocky Mountains. LIGHTS sweep the sky as GROUND CREWS run to and fro.

Air Force One is coming in for a landing.

200. INT. UNDERGROUND COMMAND BUNKER - A MOMENT LATER

Lots of activity: armed troops, top brass, and technicians milling about. Flashing panels on the walls read DEFCON 2.

SECRETARY OF STATE LIDDY watches as a METAL DOOR clangs shut, and what looks like a GOLF CART comes toodling down a long metal ramp. PRESIDENT NIXON's in the passenger seat, and there's an imposing pile of LUGGAGE in the back. He appears to be contemplating a long stay.

PRESIDENT NIXON

Hello, Gordon. Have you seen Pat?

SECRETARY LIDDY

She's all settled in. They want you down in the command room right away.

UDDY hops aboard, and the golf cart turns down a seemingly endless corridor which leads deep into the bowels of the Rockies.

SECRETARY UDDY (cont.)

Weatherman says we're lookin' good. We've got a fourteen-hour window.

PRESIDENT NIXON

Fourteen hours, huh?

SECRETARY UDDY

Fourteen hours. Unless of course the reds decide to hit us first.

CUT TO:

201. INT. OWLSHIP - NIGHT

LAURIE's following the Watchmen press coverage on an overhead screen . . .

NEWSCASTER

- in a daring midnight jailbreak. Earlier eyewitness reports place the one-time superheroes at a peace rally in -

. . . while DREIBERG and RORSCHACH sit side-by-side at the control console, occupied by other matters.

DREIBERG

I don't know if you heard. A hired gunman tried to off Adrian.

RORSCHACH

Veidt's a fool. Tried to warn him about new information. Sicked his mangy cat on me.

DREIBERG

What new information?

RORSCHACH

Blake investigating missing scientists for CTU. Dr. Manhattan somehow involved . . .

(scratching his chin)

Strange that no one's tried to attack you, Daniel.

There's an unmistakable tone of suspicion in his voice. DREIBERG, highly offended, shoots him a look of supreme resentment.

DREIBERG

I beg your pardon . . . ? Some gratitude.

LAURIE

Will you two lovebirds keep it down?

Still grumbling at each other, DREIBERG and RORSCHACH glance up at the monitor LAURIE's watching. The face of ADRIAN VEIDT fills the screen:

NEWSCASTER

. . . the man behind the Watchmen, high-tech wizard Adrian Veidt, was unavailable for comment. A spokesman claimed he had left for the Antarctic to study a mysterious hole in the ozone layer.

RORSCHACH

"Ozone layer?"

DREIBERG

(rolling his eyes)

Christ. Couldn't he just admit that he's scared??

CUT TO:

202. EXT. ANTARCTICA - NIGHT

The last rays of sunlight bleed across endless frozen plains of pristine white. A private AIRCRAFT descends toward an incongruous strip of black, part of a massive complex of buildings centered around what looks like a NUCLEAR POWER PLANT. (In fact, it is one.) This is Karnak - VEIDT's Antarctic retreat.

203. INT. KARNAK - NIGHT

The entry hall is vast and lavish, appointed in the same Egyptian style as his urban pyramid - but on a grander scale. A fur-clad figure enters in a flurry of SNOW, followed by a genetically-altered LYNX on the end of a leash; FOUR ASIAN LACKEYS appear to greet him. One of them takes his parka; a second serves him hot coffee from a silver tray; a third takes the leash, and brushes snow from the back of the lynx. Number four is in charge of protocol:

LACKEY

Welcome, sir. We did not expect you so soon.

VEIDT

Feed Bubastis. I'll have dinner when I've looked in on the world.

They hear and obey. Two of them fall in behind VEIDT and follow him to:

204. INT. INFORMATION CENTER - NIGHT

The room is empty but for a single chair, with a complicated REMOTE-CONTROL KEYPAD mounted on the armrest. Across from the chair, RED VELVET CURTAINS hang from ceiling to floor.

VEIDT takes a seat, and his LACKEYS draw back the curtains to reveal a towering WALL OF TELEVISIONS - 200 monitors in a 10x20 grid, picking up transmissions from all over the world. It's far more information than the human mind could possibly digest at one gulp, a hectic jumble of color and motion. VEIDT loves it. He settles in and his eyes begin to rove.

205. ANGLE ON VIDEO WALL

PANNING across transmissions of every variety - commercials, sitcoms, sportscasts - we settle on a screen labelled "LONDON." VEIDT hits the volume button on his remote, and a NEWSCASTER'S VOICE comes up. On the wall behind her is a civil defense logo . . .

BBC NEWSCASTER

- best situated in a cellar room, as far away from windows as possible. Cinderblock walls are preferred, but a makeshift shelter can be constructed of sandbags, or of boxes filled with -

FLICK, and the sound dies. VEIDT's gaze drifts several screens to the right, to the monitor labelled "WASHINGTON D.C." Sound up:

NEWSCASTER

- amid rumors that top-ranking officials and military personnel have already been relocated to underground bunkers. White House spokesmen insist that no such precautions have yet been taken and that ongoing negotiations -

FLICK: sound down. Now we shift to a closed-circuit monitor at the bottom right of the bank - an exterior view of VEIDT's antarctic retreat as seen by a surveillance camera. FLICK: same subject, new angle. FLICK: a RADAR SCREEN, which shows no activity; the skies are clear. FLICK -

- and now things get downright weird. Because all at once we're watching DR. JONATHAN OSTERMAN, the earnest young scientist from twenty-some years ago; he's sitting at a table in the Gila Flats test lab, with a piece of black velvet spread out before him, calmly and methodically REASSEMBLING A WATCH.

206. REVERSE ANGLE - ON VEIDT

eyeing young Osterman with a strange, grave smile.

CUT TO:

207. EXT. AERIAL SHOT - NIGHT

LOW ANGLE on the Owship as it descends slowly through the clouds. On its underbelly, a VIDEO CAMERA grinds and rotates.

208. INT. OWL SHIP - NIGHT

DREIBERG and LAURIE watch a monitor which shows an overhead view of the city. He punches up a series of PROGRESSIVE MAGNIFICATIONS, gradually zeroing in on a single city block. It's been cordoned off, POLICE BUBBLE. CARS are parked up and down its length.

DREIBERG

They've got my building surrounded.

(looking up at her)

They must've been following you all along.

She stares at him. The ship LURCHES as DREIBERG kicks in the accelerator jets and takes off into the clouds.

DREIBERG (cont.)

So much for Dan Dreiberg, ordinary citizen.

LAURIE

Welcome back, Night Owl.

DREIBERG

What now? Fly south -- hook up with Adrian?

RORSCHACH

CTU. Could be behind Dr. Manhattan frame-up.

DREIBERG

What do you mean, frame-up?

RORSCHACH

Obvious pattern -- all ties in --

DREIBERG

Are you saying someone would risk starting World War III just to get back at us?

(spreading his hands)

What about all those poor shits with cancer?

TIGHT ON LAURIE, who's listening to all this with mounting distress.

RORSCHACH

How do we know they've got cancer? Could be part of massive propaganda scheme . . .

DREIBERG

Come on, Rorschach. Gimme a break --

LAURIE

(interrupting him)

It's not.

RORSCHACH

Not what?

LAURIE

Not "propaganda."

(pause; then, blurring it out -)

Christ, I'm one of them! I've got it.

DREIBERG swivels abruptly in his chair and gazes at LAURIE, his face bone-white. She stares at the floor, afraid to meet his eyes, her grim secret revealed. For an awkward moment neither of them can think of anything to say.

Then RORSCHACH, his mind already back on the "case," breaks the silence:

RORSCHACH

Hrrr - changes everything. Let's get moving.

209. EXT. WATERFRONT WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

RORSCHACH is crouched beside an exterior wall of the warehouse; he pries off a couple of loose slats and digs around, swatting angrily at a RAT which scampers out of the hole. The OWLSHIP hovers above.

210. INT. OWLSHIP - THAT MOMENT

DREIBERG, disconsolate, holds LAURIE gently by the shoulders.

LAURIE

I should've told you, Dan. I'm sorry. I just wanted things between us to be - happy. For a while. I -

DREIBERG

It doesn't change a thing, Laurie. I love you.

He tries to pull her close but she turns away, her eyes welling up with tears.

LAURIE

I love you too, Dan, I - why don't you give me a minute to get myself together, okay?

211. EXT. WAREHOUSE - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT

A distraught DREIBERG descends the rope ladder from the OWLSHIP. RORSCHACH has uncovered a spare blot-mask; with a hiss of satisfaction he pulls it on over his head. When he turns, he sees DREIBERG staring slack-jawed at an inexplicable sight.

Above their heads, the OWLSHIP has begun to glow - BRIGHT BLUE.

212. INT. OWLSHIP - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT

LAURIE backs against the control panel as an indescent blue corona resolves itself into the figure of DR. MANHATTAN.

LAURIE

Jon. What are you doing here?

DR. MANHATTAN

I'm not here. I'm still on Mars. I've come to collect you.

LAURIE

Collect me?

DR. MANHATTAN

In the immediate future we're on Mars. I'm telling you goodbye. You're trying to convince me to cure your illness...

LAURIE

Jon, no - I can't -

DR. MANHATTAN

It will happen, Laurie. I've already seen it. Neither of us can do anything to change it.

DREIBERG's frantically climbing the ladder. He pokes his head inside the cockpit just in time to see LAURIE reaching out for DR. MANHATTAN's hand.

DREIBERG

LAURIE! DONT -

Hands touch. A shimmering blue halo surrounds DR. MANHATTAN and LAURIE, and the two of them DISSOLVE.

Stunned, DREIBERG clambers aboard. There's obviously nothing he can do. RORSCHACH is only a second or two behind him.

RORSCHACH

Where's Laurie?

DREIBERG

I don't think she's coming with us.

DISSOLVE TO:

213. EXT. MARS - NIGHT

A BLUE SLIT opens in the sky, mere inches above the Martian surface; DR. MANHATTAN steps placidly through, and a moment later LAURIE tumbles out

behind him. She takes a couple of halting steps, then GASPS SOUNDLESSLY - and PITCHES FORWARD onto the shifting red sands.

DR. MANHATTAN's gone several paces before he realizes there's a problem. Eventually, though, he turns - and spots LAURIE clawing at the air, trying and failing to draw a breath. He walks patiently back and extends his hand; LAURIE grabs it, and is magically surrounded by a HALO OF OXYGEN.

DR. MANHATTAN

The atmosphere. I'm sorry. These things slip my mind.

LAURIE

Jesus, Jon, I nearly choked to - where are we -

Ignoring her, he turns. She hurries to keep pace with him. Then she stops in her tracks.

Before her, in the distance, looms DR. MANHATTAN's new abode: a PALACE OF GLASS, vast and resplendent, towering over the barren sands. At its heart stands a gargantuan, ruby-colored HOURGLASS, surrounded by an intricate system of gears and ratchets, spires and pendulums . . . the guts of a clock, transfigured into a shimmering crystalline castle.

DR. MANHATTAN

I live here now.

He strides placidly forward. LAURIE, boggled, stumbles along after him.

CUT TO:

214. INT. OWLSHIP - NIGHT

TIGHT ON the distraught DREIBERG, his pained face illuminated by the glow of the instrument panel. RORSCHACH sits calmly behind him.

RORSCHACH

Heading south. What's the plan?

DREIBERG

We're running, Rorschach. We've got no place to go. We're hightailing it down to Adrian's.

RORSCHACH

Veidt's assassin. Leads to follow. Can't just -

DREIBERG

(exploding)

Cases, leads - they don't matter, Rorschach. The world's about to end. If someone is trying to kill us, it doesn't matter.

RORSCHACH
Coward. Giving up.

DREIBERG
SHUT UP, Rorschach.

RORSCHACH settles back, lets out a soft, thoughtful HISS.

RORSCHACH
Sorry, Daniel. You've always been a good friend.
I know that.
(pause)
Sorry about Laurie.

DREIBERG
(choked voice)
Okay, let's just . . . thank you.

For a few moments they fly on in silence. RORSCHACH can't leave well enough alone. Deep in thought, he scratches his chin.

RORSCHACH
Veidt's not stupid. Could have angle. - Might be good move.

CUT TO:

215. EXT. MARS - DR. MANHATTAN'S PALACE - NIGHT

LAURIE follows DR. MANHATTAN up a ruby-crystal stairway which spirals around the exterior of his great glass castle. Off to her side, the enormous gears and ratchets which rim its core are SHIFTING, MESHING - like the quartz movement of a fine Swiss watch.

LAURIE
This whole place is ticking. Does it - keep time?

DR. MANHATTAN
Yes. In about . . . thirty seconds, for example, you'll tell me you're sleeping with Dreiberg.

LAURIE
You - you know about me and Dan?

He gives her a cryptic smile and marches up to the next level.

DR. MANHATTAN
Time is the key, Laurie. If I can unlock the origins of time, I'll finally be able to reconcile quantum physics and relativity.

LAURIE looks at him cross-eyed – and heaves a sigh.

LAURIE

Jon, does anybody know what the hell you're talking about?

(Mustered)

Dan's just an ordinary guy, but he talks to me. When he looks at me he's seeing something more than just a – a collection of atoms.

DR. MANHATTAN

(startled)

Then you're sleeping with Dreiberg?

LAURIE

Well, I just, you just said – don't act surprised.

DR. MANHATTAN

That's how time works, Laurie. Everything is preordained . . . even my responses.

(nodding)

We're all puppets. I'm just a puppet who can see the strings. – Thirty seconds.

She GROANS in frustration as they reach a balcony near the pinnacle of the huge glass tower. The Martian plains spread out for miles below them; above, the stars stretch to infinity. A chill, violent WIND whips across their faces.

DR. MANHATTAN

I'll be here for the next year or so. Then I'm going to work my way out toward the edge of the universe.

(staring out at the landscape)

Utterly uncorrupted by man. Isn't it beautiful?

She moves to the edge of the balcony, gazes off at the bleak and fissured Martian surface. Suddenly she feels very alone – and frightened.

LAURIE

Jon – there's something I have to know. Did you love me once?

DR. MANHATTAN

Yes, I loved you. I left the earth when I lost you.

LAURIE

Yet you must've known all along that you'd give me cancer. Just by being with me.

DR. MANHATTAN

I didn't give you cancer, Laurie. Not you, not the others. I don't know what did.

LAURIE

But you knew that I'd - die.

DR. MANHATTAN

Memories of the future are just like any others. I've tried not to dwell on the unpleasant ones . . .

(pause)

You won't die of cancer, Laurie. There won't be time for that.

LAURIE's blood runs cold as she realizes what he's telling her.

LAURIE

Then it's going to happen. The world's going to end. - And you've always known.

DR. MANHATTAN

(nodding)

Always. Ever since the day I died.

He walks a few paces up the crystalline steps and surveys the forbidding Martian landscape. Behind him, LAURIE buries her face in her hands.

DR. MANHATTAN (cont.)

Do you understand now, Laurie? Do you see what it's been like for me these last years? Knowing that everything I knew and loved would be destroyed . . . and that by leaving earth, I would be the helpless agent of its destruction?

LAURIE

(sobbing)

Then why don't you . . . do something about it!

DR. MANHATTAN

Because -

LAURIE

Because you can't, I know, it's preordained. So sorry. I forgot.

(angrily)

Jon. This, this "script" you're following . . . who writes it?

DR. MANHATTAN

I don't know yet. I should be able to tell you in - roughly six hundred years.

That about tears it for LAURIE. She storms over and grabs him by the shoulders:

LAURIE

I can't stand any more of this. I want to go back.
If I'm going to die I want to be with — other people.

DR. MANHATTAN

Please, Laurie. Not yet. I've got sons stretching
before me, a universe to explore. I'll be alone.

(reaching for her hand)

You're the last human being I'll ever see.

CUT TO:

216. AERIAL SHOT - ON OWLSHIP - NIGHT

The OWLSHIP streaking through the icy stratosphere above the south Atlantic. Suddenly it BOUNCES in midair — JERKS to the right — and begins to SPIRAL DOWNWARD into the clouds . . .

217. INT. OWLSHIP - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT

DREIBERG is frantically throwing switches as they lurch to and fro. Finally he manages to get the ship righted. RORSCHACH's taken a bad tumble; he picks himself up off the cabin floor and asks:

RORSCHACH

What happened?

DREIBERG

The guidance system's fried. I had to switch to manual. — Some kind of massive electromagnetic shockwave.

RORSCHACH

What caused it?

DREIBERG

Don't know. Nothing I can think of —
(apprehensively)
— outside of a nuclear blast.

DISSOLVE TO:

218. EXT. ANTARCTICA - KARNAK - NIGHT

VEIDTS VAST COMPLEX is little more than a DIM GLOW, barely visible through a SWIRLING BLIZZARD.

219. INT. KARNAK - INFORMATION ROOM - THAT MOMENT

VEIDT sits before his VIDEO WALL, sipping mulled wine from a goblet. Almost simultaneously, two SCREENS - labelled 'MOSCOW' and 'WASHINGTON, D.C.' - go to SUDDEN BLINDING WHITE.

A second later, the screens show nothing but RANDOM VIDEO NOISE. VEIDT leans back in his chair and cocks an eyebrow, seemingly unperturbed.

220. EXT. ANTARCTICA - NIGHT

The OWLSHIP streaks downward through a TOTAL WHITEOUT.

221. INT. OWLSHIP - THAT MOMENT

Through the cockpit, KARNAK's visible - for an instant. Then, it's lost in the snows again.

DREIBERG

I'm taking her down.

(frantically throwing switches)

Radars blown. I'll have to wing it. Strap in, Rorschach -

The SHIP ROCKS with the force of a premature IMPACT.

222. EXT. ANTARCTICA - ON OWLSHIP - THAT MOMENT

The Owlship takes a HARD BOUNCE against the snow. The hull CRUMPLES as the craft TIPS SIDEWAYS and plows into a DEEP DRIFT.

A HATCH springs open, and DREIBERG and RORSCHACH dig their way out. They're slightly underdressed for the weather. Spotting the lights of Karnak in the distance, they turn up their collars and PRESS ON.

223. INT. KARNAK - INFORMATION ROOM - THAT MOMENT

VEIDT's eyeing the closed-circuit SECURITY MONITOR which shows the exterior of the complex. He spots TWO TINY FIGURES slogging through the blizzard.

As he watches, the screens for "LONDON" and "PARIS" go WHITE.

224. EXT. KARNAK - A MOMENT LATER

DREIBERG and RORSCHACH, half-frozen and covered with frost, make it to the great metal entry doors - and START BANGING. A VIDEO CAMERA mounted over the door rotates into position. A soothing, computerized WOMAN'S VOICE announces:

VOICE

Welcome to Karnak. Please identify yourself.

DREIBERG

Adrian! It's Dreiberg. For God's sake open the doors.

Nothing happens. DREIBERG POUNDS against the doors.

DREIBERG (cont.)

Adrian! We're freezing to death out here!

He slumps to the ground exhausted, barely able to draw a breath. The snow lies in FOUR-FOOT DRIFTS against the door.

RORSCHACH

. . . He's not coming, Daniel.

225. INT. KARNAK - INFORMATION ROOM - THAT MOMENT

On the surveillance monitor, RORSCHACH and DREIBERG shamble off. VEIDT stands, hits his remote. The picture dies - leaving a mere 199 screens in operation.

The wall is now checkerboarded with monitors showing nothing but VIDEO SNOW. As VEIDT strides calmly out of the room, "PRAGUE" goes white.

226. EXT. KARNAK - NIGHT

DREIBERG on his knees, half-buried in snow. He topples forward, unable to go on. A PAIR OF GLOVED HANDS enter frame and YANK HIM UPWARD.

DREIBERG

Can't move . . . we're done for.

RORSCHACH

Come on. Found an exhaust vent.

RORSCHACH drags the helpless DREIBERG around the side of the complex, where SNOW blows in flurries at the mouth of a TUNNEL-LIKE STRUCTURE.

RORSCHACH (cont.)

Veidt. It's been Veidt all along. He'll pay for this.

227. INT. KARNAK - DINING HALL - NIGHT

VEIDT alone at a long table in his cavernous dining hall, coolly eating dinner. Behind him, above the mammoth entry doors, hangs a TAPESTRY - Alexander slicing through the Gordian Knot.

TWO BATTERED FIGURES creep silently into the hall.

VEIDT sits calmly, betraying nothing. At his side, the MUTANT LYNX growls. His hand closes tightly around the scruff of the animal's neck quiet, girl.

RORSCHACH reaches into his trenchcoat and pulls out a RHODOPSIN FLASHER - the same weapon CAPT. METROPOLIS used in the opening scene. Suddenly . . .

RORSCHACH

VEIDT

VEIDT WHIRLS. He flings a PLATTER, Frisbee-style, across the hall; it catches RORSCHACH on the chin and sends him sprawling. DREIBERG backs against a wall in horror as the LYNX comes sprinting toward him, TEETH BARED.

VEIDT claps his hands twice, and the CAT relents. He reaches for a futuristic STUN GUN, which has been lying on the table all along - part of the place setting - and advances on his old colleagues.

DREIBERG

Adrian. What are you doing? Why wouldn't you let us in?

RORSCHACH

He's the one. He's been the one all along. Stalking us.

DREIBERG

Adrian - you? You killed Blake, and -

VEIDT

Yeah. See, I've been working on a little project. Top secret, of course . . .

DREIBERG

The missing scientists.

VEIDT

Uh huh. You might recognize the names. Quite a few of them worked at Gila Flats.

RORSCHACH

Gila Flats - place where Jon turned into . . .

VEIDT

Dr. Manhattan, right. Now if you boys care to join me, we'll go save the world.

228. INT. KARNAK - A MOMENT LATER - NIGHT

Gun in hand, VEIDT marches them through the halls of Karnak. RORSCHACH throws an occasional glance behind him; the LYNX is nipping at his heels.

VEIDT

Blake thought the Russians were trying to spirit off our researchers - to create their own nuclear superman. It wasn't Russia.

(tapping his chest)

It was me. When he figured that out, of course I had to kill him. The rest of it - Rorschach's capture, my "assassination" - that was just to keep you busy. All that really mattered was getting rid of Dr. Manhattan.

DREIBERG

What??

VEIDT

I couldn't let him interfere with my project.

RORSCHACH

Veidt. You're the one who started World War III.

VEIDT

No. I just hastened the inevitable.

(smiling)

He's been ready to blow for years. I knew all it would take was a little push. So I, uh . . . gave his friends and associates cancer.

DREIBERG

Laurie? You're responsible for -

VEIDT reaches into his pocket for his gold cigarette case. He pulls out a smoke and strikes it against the box.

VEIDT (cont.)

One thing I've learned about cancer - it's much easier to generate than it is to cure.

DREIBERG, enraged, CHARGES at him. The LYNX roars. VEIDT swings the stun gun across DREIBERG's face, knocking him to the floor - and LEVELS the futuristic weapon DIRECTLY AT HIS HEAD.

VEIDT

Let's get something straight. If you try that again, I'll kill you without a moment's regret.

They've reached the entrance to VEIDT's information room. 200 SCREENS blink and flicker as he waves the gun, gesturing them inside.

RORSCHACH

Call off the cat and I'll kill you, Veidt.

VEIDT

Before you do that, you might want to look at what I've been working on.

229. INT. INFORMATION ROOM - A MOMENT LATER

VEIDT points them over to the monitor in the bottom right-hand corner. Onscreen, the young JON OSTERMAN sits in a lab at Gila Flats, reassembling a WATCH.

DREIBERG

What is this? It looks like Jon.

VEIDT

It is Jon. Twenty-four years ago. Before he turned into Dr. Manhattan.

DREIBERG

Good Lord. How'd you get it on tape?

VEIDT

It's not on tape. It's live. We're watching it happen.

CUT TO:

230. EXT. MARS - DR. MANHATTAN'S PALACE - NIGHT

DR. MANHATTAN peers off the edge of a balcony while, behind him, LAURIE dines at a sumptuously appointed table. She feels as if she's hit the jackpot in some freakish contest - Win A Dream Date On Mars.

DR. MANHATTAN

I almost envy you, Laurie. In my present form I can't die. It's a mystery I'd like to penetrate.

LAURIE

Jon, I do not want to hear it.

DR. MANHATTAN

I'm sorry. Look - there's a gas storm on the Valles Marineris . . .

LAURIE

(shaking her head)

Oh God. I'm no more than a bug on a windshield to you.

DR. MANHATTAN

You're the only human being I care for.

LAURIE

Then do me a favor. If the world's going to end, it shouldn't matter a bit.

(pause)

I want you to cure me.

DR. MANHATTAN

I won't do that.

LAURIE

You have the power to do it. I want you to do it. Please.

DR. MANHATTAN

I explained this. I can't. That's not the way it happens.

LAURIE

Jon. If you ever loved me — if there's anything human left in you — then do it.

Eyes wild, she GRABS his great blue HAND — and THRUSTS IT into her chest, where it DISAPPEARS UP TO THE WRIST.

Her fingers tighten around his forearm. Their GAZES LOCK. DR. MANHATTAN shuts his eyes and grimaces, as if he's got to make the hardest decision of his life. And then . . .

A BRILLIANT BLUE AURA engulfs them both. It SPREADS and GROWS IN INTENSITY, suffusing the sky, finally BLOTTING OUT the vast Martian landscape altogether.

With a sudden POP the aura begins to die. For a split-second we see the figures of LAURIE and DR. MANHATTAN suspended against a great white VOID. Then colors begin to appear, the crystal castle and the Martian desert gradually materialize around them.

The two of them stumble back from each other and stand there like statues, awestruck. Neither one seems quite sure what's happened.

LAURIE

What — am I —

DR. MANHATTAN

Cured, yes.

Utterly spent, he staggers to the edge of the balcony, grabs a handrail for support. He looks like a man who's just had a heart attack.

LAURIE

Jon, what is it? What's the matter?

When he looks up at her, he's DESOLATE – his face filled with DREAD.

DR. MANHATTAN

Something . . . incomprehensible has happened.
It's all gone blank on me. – I can't remember the future.

Slowly – very slowly – she draws near and puts her arms around him.

LAURIE

Jon. Let's go back to earth.

CUT TO:

231. INT. KARNAK - LAB AREA - NIGHT

VEIDT, DREIBERG and RORSCHACH enter a lab space which puts the I.F. room at Gila Flats to shame. In the midst of the massive whirring machinery sits a GLOWING BLUE DOME – a BUBBLE of PURE ENERGY.

Inside its shimmering contours is a little corner of GILA FLATS. JON OSTERMAN tightens a screw, and sets the movement of JANEY's watch into its brass housing – totally oblivious to the strange trio watching him from twenty-four years in the future.

VEIDT

Gentlemen, the past. Unfolding before your eyes.
(pause)

Stand back from the field. It'll blow you to bits.

DREIBERG

What is it? How does it work?

VEIDT

It's a tachyon chamber. It generates subatomic particles which flow backward in time.

(smiling)

There are other worlds, Daniel, other timelines – existing parallel to our own –

DREIBERG

Adrian – you've lost it.

VEIDT

(pointing at the tachyon bubble)

I've seen them! I've seen them in there.

(pause)

In some of them – only a few – the human race survives. And it survives because Dr. Manhattan never existed.

He draws closer to the tachyon bubble. Off to one side is the CAMERA which feeds the monitor in the VIDEO ROOM -- and beside it, mounted on a tripod, is a HIGH-POWERED TELESCOPIC RIFLE.

VEIDT (cont.)

The creation of Dr. Manhattan was a flashpoint in history. He threw the world balance of power totally out of whack. And his absence -- for even a week -- virtually guaranteed a catastrophic war.

(wild-eyed)

Do you understand now? Do you see what I'm going to do? I'm going to change the past!

232. EXT. OUTER SPACE - THAT MOMENT

DR. MANHATTAN and LAURIE materialize in orbit around the earth, enveloped in a BUBBLE OF OXYGEN. Far below, the nuclear birds are already aloft; TINY PINPRICKS OF LIGHT flash over New York and San Francisco.

LAURIE

We're too late.

DR. MANHATTAN

It's very strange. Time's flowing backwards . . .

LAURIE

Jon -- what??

DR. MANHATTAN

The south pole. Time's flowing backwards.

233. INT. KARNAK - LAB - THAT MOMENT

Inside the tachyon chamber, JON OSTERMAN fits the glass crystal back into place on JANEY's watch. VEIDT looks on in fascination.

VEIDT

At first we could only watch the past. Now we can reach out and touch it.

He steps over to the rifle, peers through its telescopic sight.

VEIDT (cont.)

It ate up enough megawatts to light the eastern seaboard for a year and a half -- but last week I managed to open a dime-sized hole for almost three seconds.

(turning to face them)

In a minute I'll do it again. And if my aim is true, I'll put a bullet through Jon Osterman's heart . . . and Dr. Manhattan will never be born.

DREIBERG and RORSCHACH trade looks of disbelief.

RORSCHACH

. . . And they call me a fucking nut.

DREIBERG

Adrian. It's too late. The world is blowing up as we stand here.

VEIDT

Don't be obtuse, Daniel. If I kill Jon in the past, none of this will happen. We won't even be here, will we?

DREIBERG

And what if you're wrong?

VEIDT

I'm not.

DREIBERG

What if you're wrong??

VEIDT

Then I've been a very bad boy and you'll have to spank me. Christ!

(shouting)

I'm doing what I have to do to save the godforsaken human race!!

234. EXT. ANTARCTICA - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT

A POCKET OF BLUE HAZE materializes in the snow-swept skies above Karnak. Inside it: LAURIE and DR. MANHATTAN.

DR. MANHATTAN

That's it. That's the source of the time disturbance.

LAURIE

Jon, where are we?

DR. MANHATTAN

Veidt's complex.

235. INT. KARNAK - LAB - THAT MOMENT

Twenty-four years ago, JON OSTERMAN is packing his jeweler's tools, folding his swatch of black velvet. In the present, VEIDT is raving:

VEIDT

Your problem, Dan, is a lack of vision. You spent all those years chasing after muggers, and drug dealers, and lawwalkers . . . as if the world was any better for it. As if any of it mattered.

DREIBERG

You ruthless son of a bitch. You really believe this mad-scientist bullshit is going to save the world?

VEIDT

We'd better hope so. -- It's almost time.

He kicks a floor switch. GIANT NUCLEAR GENERATORS begin to hum. Then he bends over the rifle and peers through the sight.

236. VEIDT'S POV - THROUGH CROSSHAIRS

In the past, JON OSTERMAN is reaching for his lab coat when he hears a SQUEAK. He picks up a broom . . .

237. INT. KARNAK - LAB - THAT MOMENT

A LUMINESCENT WHITE SPOT appears on the surface of the tachyon bubble. There's a hideous WHINE as a tiny HOLE begins to open up -- DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF VEIDT'S RIFLE. His finger closes around the trigger . . .

. . . and with a TERRIBLE CRASH, the LAB WALL COLLAPSES BEHIND HIM. VEIDT DIVES BACKWARD, DODGING RUBBLE . . .

. . . as a BLUE GIANT, THIRTY FEET TALL, steps into the lab -- with LAURIE at his side.

DR. MANHATTAN

WHAT ARE YOU DOING, VEIDT?

VEIDT

Joni! Get back! You don't understand.

DR. MANHATTAN stares down at the TACHYON BUBBLE and sees himself -- his former self -- chasing a MOUSE out of the I.F. chamber at Gila Flats. His eyes go wide. Even he's surprised.

In the ensuing panic, DREIBERG dives at VEIDT. VEIDT manages to sidestep him, frantically trying to get to his rifle. The HOLE IN THE BUBBLE has grown to the size of a quarter.

VEIDT lunges toward the rifle. LAURIE's directly in his path. He shoves her aside; they grapple; he flings her to the ground and points his STUN GUN directly at her --

- and a millisecond later, he's aiming at NOTHING. DR. MANHATTAN has instantaneously TELEPORTED LAURIE across the room, out of his line of fire.

VEIDT looks up in horror, just in time to see a BLUE BOLT OF LIGHTNING launching itself from DR. MANHATTAN's outstretched finger -

VEIDT

NO!!!!

- and in the wink of an eye, he's VAPORIZED. All that's left is a pair of CHARRED BOOTS, still standing upright.

DREIBERG rushes over to LAURIE, takes her in his arms.

LAURIE

What was he doing?

DREIBERG

Trying to change the past. He said it was the only way to save the world -

DR. MANHATTAN stares at the TACHYON BUBBLE, mesmerized. Inside, the door to the I.F. chamber has just swung SHUT on a terrified JON OSTERMAN.

DR. MANHATTAN

He was right.

RORSCHACH, LAURIE and DREIBERG stare up at the blue behemoth in puzzlement. DR. MANHATTAN begins to SHRINK to normal size. He runs his hand over the surface of the tachyon bubble; BRIGHT BLUE SPARKS shoot off in all directions.

DR. MANHATTAN

He did it. Veidt broke the code. It's so elegant. It's so obvious.

DR. MANHATTAN's off in another world, as usual. He wears a BEATIFIC SMILE as he watches his own imminent destruction in the tachyon chamber.

LAURIE

Jon -

DR. MANHATTAN

Space and time. I finally understand, Laurie. I see it all now.

LAURIE

Jon - for God's sake, what do you see?

DR. MANHATTAN

I see what the watchmaker made. I see the universe!

He lifts his arms; PARTICLES OF LIGHT appear from nowhere and whiz around his body like superaccelerated fireflies. The lights in the room dim; it's as if DR. MANHATTAN is absorbing all the power of the world into his own massive frame.

DR. MANHATTAN

My work here is finished . . .

The others cower. They sense that something large is about to happen. In the past, JON OSTERMAN is pounding on the glass of the test chamber; in the present, DR. MANHATTAN reaches out to touch the tiny hole in time.

He does, and in a BLAZE of BLINDING BLUE LIGHT the tiny rift EXPANDS into a SHIMMERING FISSURE. DR. MANHATTAN PEELS BACK ITS EDGES AND STEPS THROUGH . . . INTO THE PAST.

238. INT. TEST CHAMBER - THAT MOMENT

JON OSTERMAN turns away from the observation panel. To his utter bewilderment, a HUGE BLUE FIGURE - surrounded by sparks and smiling gloriously - has materialized in the chamber behind him.

DR. MANHATTAN

Don't be afraid, Jon. I'll be with you.

A second before the particle cannons kick in, DR. MANHATTAN steps forward - and FUSES WITH JON, their bodies becoming one.

For a moment JON is still visible, with DR. MANHATTAN's frame surrounding him, like a translucent shield of pure energy; then DR. MANHATTAN coalesces into a solid protective HUSK around him. As the chamber begins to glow, a network of HAIRLINE CRACKS spreads across the shell of his body. BLUE LIGHT spills through the seams; he spreads his hands - not in pain, but in triumph; and with a blinding FLASH, DR. MANHATTAN explodes outward, a million fragments merging with nothingness . . .

. . . to expose a dumbstruck JON OSTERMAN in his place. The blue light dims and the chamber reverts to normal. Miraculously, he's alive - astonished, but perfectly intact.

239. INT. GILA FLATS TEST LAB - A MOMENT LATER

The timelocked door pops open and JON staggers out into the midst of his awed colleagues, who've seen everything through the observation panel.

SCIENTIST

What in the name of God . . .

The SCIENTISTS advance cautiously toward the chamber. JANEY, sobbing, rushes forward and throws her arms around the dazed JON. As she clings to him, her face pressed tightly against his chest, he looks down at his hands; his fist is still closed around . . .

JON

Your watch, Janey. I fixed your watch --

SCIENTIST II

LOOK!

The SCIENTIST is staring wide-eyed at the rear wall of the chamber . . . which isn't there. Instead, there's a rippling, irregular RUPTURE -- a pulsating HOLE IN TIME -- and visible beyond it are three odd-looking and very frightened figures: DREIBERG, LAURIE, and RORSCHACH.

240. REVERSE ANGLE - VEIDT'S LAB - THE PRESENT

DREIBERG, LAURIE and RORSCHACH stare THROUGH the rupture at the astounded SCIENTISTS.

LAURIE

What happened -- ?

DREIBERG

He saved himself. He changed the past.

LAURIE

Where did he go?

Before DREIBERG can suggest an answer, the cleft in time begins to THROB and SHIMMER, slowly SEALING ITSELF OFF before their eyes. For a moment everything's back to normal --

-- and then, to their mounting horror, the room they're in begins to DISSOLVE AROUND THEM . . . FADING AWAY INTO A BLANK WHITE VOID.

A sudden percussive POP. The white void seems to shrivel around them, collapsing into a protective bubble of force as they plunge into . . .

241. EXT. VORTEX EFFECT

DREIBERG, LAURIE and RORSCHACH spinning and tumbling through an otherdimensional funhouse of sound and color. If space and time could be compressed into a single extravagant E-ticket joyride, this would be it. Their bodies contract and distend, warp and elongate; their tortured mouths emit soundless shrieks; and then, before they know it, they find themselves deposited --

242. EXT. NEW YORK STREET - NIGHT

- smack in the middle of a busy intersection. The three of them materialize from nowhere; a southbound VAN swerves to avoid them, slamming into a row of parked cars, and a northbound TAXICAB does the same, knocking over a fire hydrant.

LAURIE

Dan, is this - is this New York??

DREIBERG

Those cars. What year is this??

LAURIE

Everything's changed -

It's a disorienting world they've landed in. In fact, it's our world, our New York, and everything - the cars, the clothing, the very look of the city - seems just a trifle out of whack . . .

RORSCHACH

Hnnnn - we never happened.

BYSTANDERS cluster about, laughing and taunting, highly amused by the obvious puzzlement of the freakish trio in their midst. There are, of course, no costumed heroes in our world, and their sudden presence prompts a Babel of speculation among the onlookers: Nuts? Fruits? Out-of-work actors?

RORSCHACH takes a swing at one of the curious, who gets a touch too close, and the mood begins to turn hostile. The CROWD, now grown to several dozen people, is threatening to block the intersection altogether; a MOUNTED POLICEMAN rides up on his stallion and blows a shrill WHISTLE.

DREIBERG

Oh my God, they still ride around on horses!

243. EXT. NEWSSTAND - THAT MOMENT

The same newsstand we've seen all along - but luckily, here in our world, the headlines are only mildly discouraging: "RUSSIAN SUMMIT TALKS COLLAPSE." Like everyone else, our old friend the NEWS VENDOR is gaping at the ruckus on the street.

NEWS VENDOR

Jesus Christ, it must be Halloween.

His sidekick, the small black KID who reads comic books, points to the befuddled trio on the street and LAUGHS in gleeful recognition.

KID

Shit, man! It's Rorschach! And Night Owl!

NEWS VENDOR

What are you talkin' about?

KID

Superheroes! Check it out!

He thrusts a COMIC BOOK into the NEWS VENDOR's hand and races off to join the growing throng of rubbernecks. The NEWS VENDOR stares down at the costumed characters in the comic book - "WATCHMEN" - then throws a cockeyed squint at their real-life counterparts on the street.

KID

All right! They must be on a case.

244. EXT. STREET - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT

HORNS BLARE. ALL TRAFFIC HAS STOPPED. The intersection is mobbed with curious ONLOOKERS. By now a half-dozen BEAT COPS have arrived to clear the streets and restore order.

COP I

Break it up! Stand back!

COP II

Come on, you three. If this is some kind of publicity stunt -

DREIBERG, LAURIE, and RORSCHACH have fallen into a tight circle. They don't know what to expect and they're poised for a brawl. The taunting crowd gives them plenty of room; even the COPS are hesitant to advance.

LAURIE

Dan - what do we do now?

DREIBERG

(panicked)

Wherever we are, it's better than what we left.
Backs together -

LAURIE

We'll tell them what's happened. They'll listen to reason, won't they - ?

RORSCHACH

They'd better.

And on RORSCHACH's final vicious HISS, we SHOCK CUT TO BLACK and

FADE OUT.

THE END